

The Old Percy Road

By

Dan Buchanan

The story of The Percy Road which ran from Brighton Village to Norham in the early 1800's and was replaced by Number 30 Highway as the main north-south thoroughfare of Brighton Township.

Copyright 2011 Dan Buchanan

Last Revised: April 5 2011

This work is the property of Dan Buchanan and is provided on a non-commercial basis. Readers are encouraged to download, save, copy and print this work for non-commercial uses. Any commercial use of all or part of this work is not allowed except by permission of Dan Buchanan.

The Old Percy Road

The next time you drive west out of Brighton watch for the first side street on the right, just after the White House and before the first apple orchard. It's called "Percy Street". If you are a bit more curious, turn up Percy Street and you will find that it goes only a short distance until it ends in a circle of trees. But look to the north and you will see a narrow double track that goes up the hill and disappears into forest shadows. Hmmmm... Maybe this road used to go farther north.

I grew up at Codrington, a small village on Number 30 Highway at the north end of Brighton Township. During the last half of the 1960's I attended East Northumberland Secondary School in Brighton. My hobby is researching history and genealogy for the area and, in the course of several years of research, I have learned much about the history of the small communities located throughout the countryside, especially the events and conditions that effected the earliest settlement and development of Brighton, Cramahe and Murray Townships.

In 2004 The Percy Road came to the surface as a topic of interest and much time was spent on research, including several summer weekends on the back roads of Brighton Township, studying maps and taking pictures. The result is a better understanding of The Percy Road along with the history and geography of the area. This story is an attempt to provide some of that information to readers.



The Percy Road was the main north-south highway leading north out of the Village of Brighton during the first half of the 1800's. (See Map at the end of the Story) It began as early as the first decade of the century as settlers blazed a trail on the lot line between Lots 3 and 4 in Concession 2 of Cramahe Township, heading north from the Danforth Highway. More settlers came and took up land farther back in the township so the road pushed itself around Butler Creek and over the hills to the 4th Concession and the village of Hilton.

The road would have been extended even farther north by the 1820's when the area north and west of Hilton, which we know as the Goodrich-Loomis Conservation Area, was settled. Soon grist and saw mills were operating on the banks of Cold Creek. In its heyday in the 1830's and 1840's it ran all the way to Percy Township, providing a critical link between the harbour and merchants at Brighton and the farming and timber cutting community around the present day villages of Warkworth and Norham.

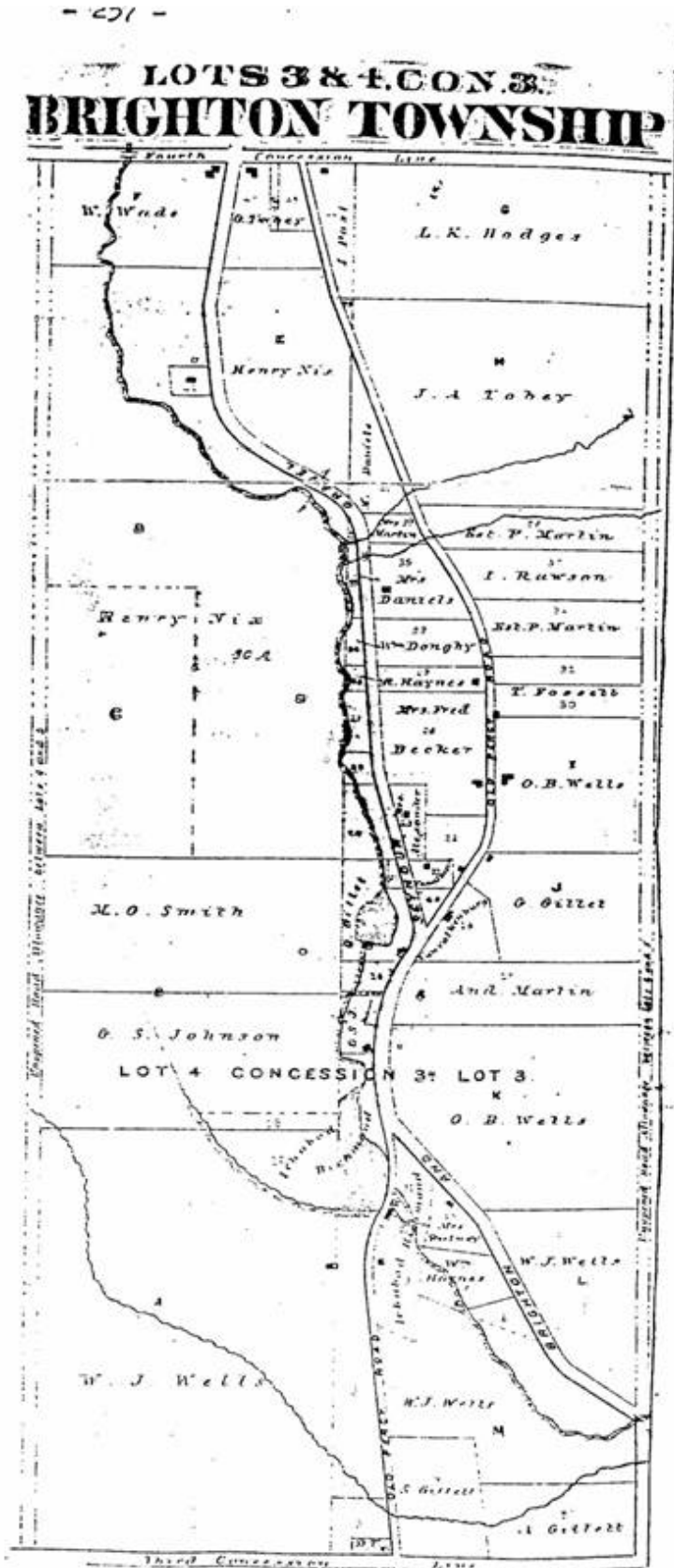
Today, The Percy Road does not exist and has been forgotten. What happened to it? Simply put - change happened. Almost 200 years of changes have caused whole communities to fade away while others grew and prospered. In Brighton Township the communities along The Percy Road were hubs of activity in the early and middle parts of the 1800's but by the middle of the 1900's were reduced to a few houses at crossroads off the main transportation routes.

Later in the story we will take a tour along The Percy Road from Brighton to Norham, to the extent that we are able to do that today. We will see the various families who lived along the route and some major events that shaped the road and the communities. First, let's provide some background.

The specific name "The Old Percy Road" is found on a map on page 257 of the Tobey Book. What is the Tobey Book, you say? Good question. If you go to the Brighton Public Library and ask to see The Tobey Book, you

The Old Percy Road

will be taken upstairs and shown a large book that may remind you of an old family bible. For the residents of Brighton and area, that's about what The Tobey Book represents.



The material contained in The Tobey Book was written and assembled by Mr. Wilmot Maxwell Tobey, a resident of Brighton and a member of a United Empire Loyalist family which had settled in Prince Edward County. In 1975 the existing material was edited by Wilfred M. Sprung and Barbara Nyland, a history student at Queen's University. Miss Nyland also compiled and edited further material for the years from 1856 to 1939.

For anyone who is interested in Brighton history, The Tobey Book is a must-see, whether you sit with the old book or browse through the digital version on the Library computer. It concentrates on the Village of Brighton but there is a lot of information about the surrounding communities, especially regarding early events and people. It is presented in sequential order, with chapters for each year. The pages abound with items such as newspaper clippings and minutes of council meetings. There are many lists of local individuals including those who were married that year, those who were officers of the Agricultural Society and those who were elected to be Postmasters or Fence Viewers, to name only a few. The Tobey Book contains many interesting details about the people and institutions of a small and growing community.

Now back to the map. This map (see above) shows a small section of Brighton Township, Concession 3, Lots 3 and 4 which contains the area just north of Brighton village, including Kankerville north to the current 401 and Number 30 interchange. The map is from around 1853 and even then we can see that the road that comes north from the bottom of the map is labelled "Old Percy Road". If it was the "Old" road in 1853, it must have been The Percy Road for a long time before that. In this story, it will be called The Percy Road.

The Old Percy Road

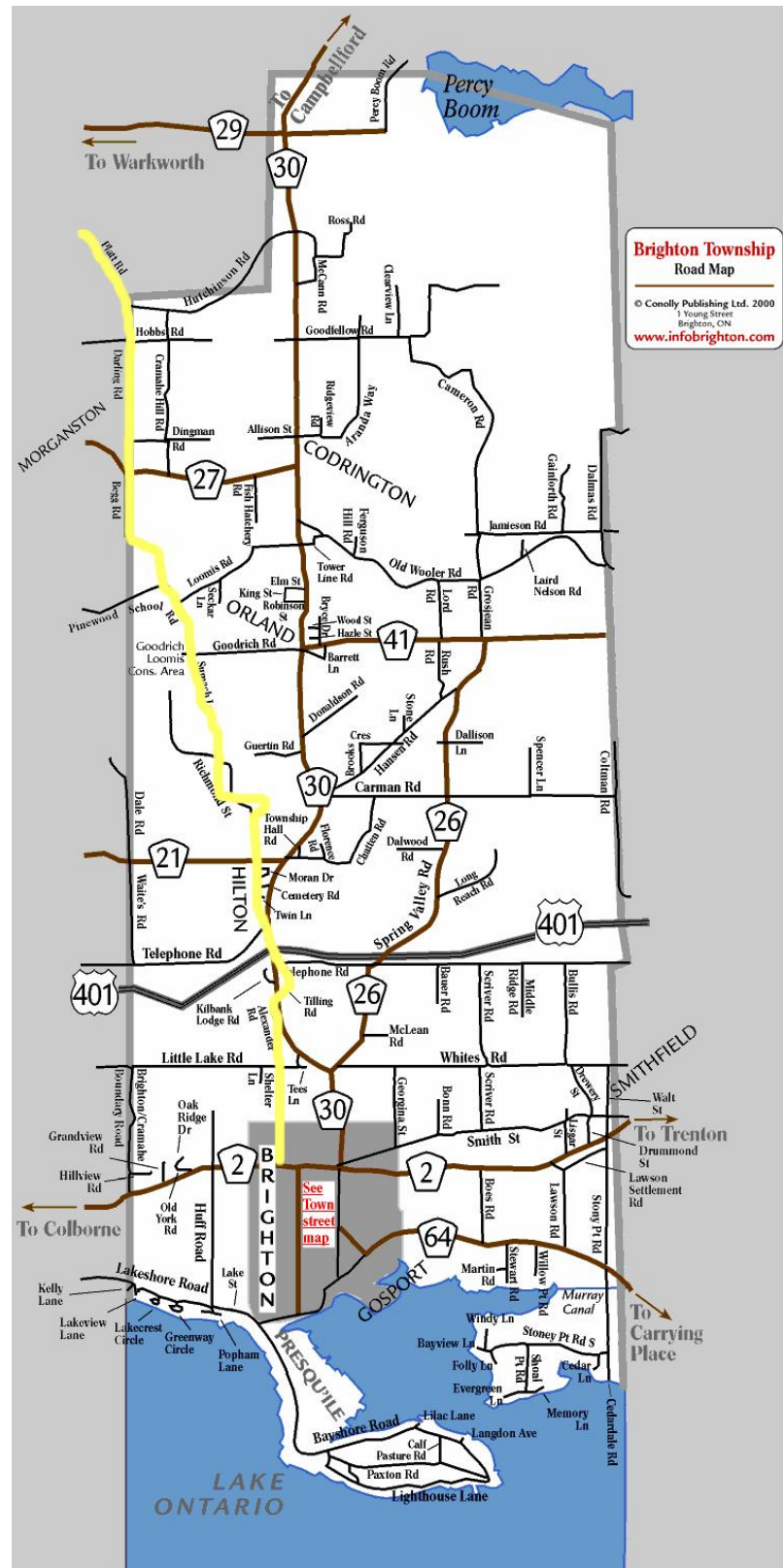
How did The Percy Road get started? Who were the early settlers on this road and how did settlement happen?

In 1796 Obadiah Simpson settled with his family on Lot 4, Concession 2 of Cramahe Township. Land Registry Records show that he obtained the Patent for all 200 acres of the lot from the Crown on August 10, 1801. The Simpson's were United Empire Loyalists, originally from the Cape Fear area of North Carolina. They had gone to Nova Scotia after the Revolutionary War and then spent a few years at Adolphustown before obtaining the land in Cramahe Township. Obadiah Simpson is known to be the first settler on the land that would later become the village of Brighton. A cairn to that effect is located near the entrance to Presqu'ile Park.

The Simpson land, Lot 4, Concession 2, was on the north side of Number 2 Highway west of Brighton, at the place where we now see an apple orchard on the west side of Percy Street. If you check the next side street to the west you will see that it is called "Simpson Street". Other early settlers took lots in this immediate area, including the Bettes and Richmond families.

A few years after Obadiah Simpson settled here, the Government of Upper Canada contracted with Asa Danforth to build a road from York (later named Toronto) to Kingston. That road, called "The Danforth Road" or later "The York Road" was built in the first few years of the new century and ran right along the south edge of Obadiah Simpson's land.

During the first decades of the century, a small community grew up near the Simpson farm. One of the main participants were members of the Bettes family who owned land and operated several businesses on Concession 1, just south of the Simpson farm. Another early settler in that immediate area is mentioned on page 47 of The Tobey book. "Jeremiah Scripture in 1808 lived on Lot 6 south of Main Street and owned 200 acres of land."



Brighton Township Road Map with the Old Percy Road in yellow. Many thanks to The Brighton Independent and Conolly Publishing, Inc. for permission to use this map. The thick yellow line that goes from Brighton up to Platt Road is the route of The Percy Road. This map demonstrates the difference between The Percy Road, which was the main north-south route in the first half of the 1800's, and Number 30 Highway, which is today's version of the Brighton and Seymour Gravel of the 1850's.

The Old Percy Road

Down Danforth Road to the east, another group of settlers came together over time. On page 51 of The Tobey Book we see “Captain George Singleton, after service in the 1776 war with the United States, was granted 5,000 acres of land, part of which now forms the city of Belleville. John Singleton, the son of George Singleton, settled near what is now Brighton and the area in 1811 became known as Singleton’s Corners.”

Captain George Singleton died in 1789 and his widow, Nancy, married Captain Alexander Chisholm, who had been a colleague of Captain Singleton during the Revolutionary War. Captain Chisholm was anxious to use his considerable resources to found a town. His efforts in their initial home at the mouth of Moira River were not successful so they moved to Murray Township and by 1799 he had built a saw mill near the mouth of Butler Creek on the north shore of Presqu’ile Bay. The Chisholm’s and Singleton’s appear at the top of the first page of the 1803 Census of Murray Township. Alexander Chisholm was a very prominent citizen in the area until his death in 1810 and then his wife managed their real estate investments to good effect. In 1831 the Chisholm and Singleton land would become part of the east side of Brighton Village.

In 1810 Josiah Proctor came from Vermont and settled on Lot 2, Concession 2, between the Simpson/Bettes area to the west and the Singleton/Chisholm area to the east. He and his sons would later own land in and around the village of Brighton. Initially, however, the gathering of buildings at the corner of The Danforth Road and The Percy Road was the larger community of the two, partly due to The Percy Road which ran between Lot 3 and 4, supported traffic from the newly settled lands to the north. In the early decades there was a serious rivalry between the two centres as each tried to outdo the other and become more prosperous. There was even talk of naming the communities with two separate names but nothing came of it.

The Village of Brighton was formed in 1831 and was given its name by consensus of council on the suggestion of Rev. Joseph Lockwood who was the village’s first Postmaster. Rev. Lockwood had been born in Connecticut and came to Upper Canada as an itinerant Methodist Minister about 1810. He picked the location of Brighton to settle down and raise his family and when it came time to give the place a formal name, he reached back to his family’s ancestral home in Brighton, England for inspiration.

During the first decades of the 1800’s settlers came and took up land in “The Back Concessions”. Just north of the Simpson farm there was a community called Tompkins Corners where Philip Tompkins and his family lived. The close proximity of the Simpson and Tompkins families is demonstrated by the fact that two children of William Simpson married two children of Philip Tompkins. Much later, in 1860, Caleb Tompkins operated Toll Gate #4 on The Percy Road, according to page 376 of The Tobey Book.

Just north of there, Cyrus Richmond had obtained the Patent from the Crown for all 200 acres of Lot 4, Concession 4, Cramahe Township, dated October 31, 1803. He was part of a large United Empire Loyalist family with roots in Connecticut via Dutchess County, New York. Cyrus operated both saw and plaster mills near the place later called Kankerville. Ichabod Richmond, a brother of Cyrus, owned land on the west and south of what would develop into the village of Hilton.

Another Connecticut family settled north of Hilton along the banks of Cold Creek. Levi, Chester and Richard Loomis settled on Lots 9 and 10 of Concessions 6 and 7, which places them west of present day Orland, in the area of the current day Goodrich-Loomis Conservation Area.

With all these people settling to the north, a trail would have developed to satisfy the need to move people, supplies and produce. In some places the road would have been planned based on lot and concession lines but in other places it would have taken shape over time based on geography. Hills and creeks and swamps were obstacles that affected the route. In those days it was easier to go around than over or through.

The Old Percy Road

Another development that would have increased the need for a road was the early settlement and growth of the area at the south end of Percy Township. Just two years after Obadiah Simpson had settled on his land at Brighton, Jacob Dingman settled on Lot 12 of Concession 2 in Percy Township. A survey in 1799 showed only 5 families living in Percy and they included the Dingman's, with three of Jacob's sons having young families. The Brunson brothers were there as well as James Merriam and his family. All were United Empire Loyalists. The Merriam's and Brunson's had come from Connecticut. The Dingman's were from the small village of Kinderhook in Columbia County, New York, just south of Albany and east of the Hudson River. Some of the Dingman's had been at the Machiche Camp in Quebec during the Revolutionary War while several members of their family fought for the British. Then they had lived for about four years in Fredericksburgh Township, south west of Napanee, before moving into the forests of Percy.

One might wonder why a group of families settled this far north as early as 1798. My theory is that they were organized to come to Percy in order to cut timber. The British had a very serious need for large oak timber to supply their growing navy. The Thirteen Colonies were no longer a good source for this raw material, as they had been before the Revolutionary War. As a result, British military officials and timber merchants searched throughout Upper Canada for accessible stands of oak timber. Such a source existed in Percy Township in the form of the oak forests that the first settlers found in the western side of Percy and into Cramahe and Alnwick Townships. It's no mistake that the area was called Oak Hills. Even better, a major river was located only a few miles away. Percy Boom, where the Trent River bends and widens just south of Campbellford, was a very convenient spot to assemble large timber and float them down the river to Trenton.

It's easy to confuse this earlier "timber" industry with the later "lumber" business. In the early decades of the 1800's, the traffic in wood was more in timber than lumber. Of course, there were saw mills built on creeks where water power was available but that was mostly to serve local demand. It wasn't until later in the century that the lumber business became dominant.

The timber industry was based on square timber, often called a "deal", a large chunk of wood measuring something around 18 feet long, 20 inches wide and 10 inches thick. Men with axes cut down trees and hewed them into deals which were drawn by teams of oxen to the closest stream and floated down to assembly points. The deals were lashed together to form large rafts which were floated down the St. Lawrence River and beached near Montreal where agents of English timber merchants bid on lots or collected the deals that fell under pre-arranged contracts. Most of the deals were shipped to England where they were cut to order in large sawmills.

Timber gradually went out of fashion as more saw mills were built in local areas and the demand for wood shifted to the huge and growing market of the United States where cut lumber was the product in demand. The last deal was cut in Ontario around 1910.

We can see that the name "The Percy Road" came from the northern terminus of the road at Norham, which was in the south end of Percy Township. Today, we know of the name Percy Township but, in the first half of the 1800's, the name Percy was also used to identify the small communities that grew up around the mills which were built on the creeks at the towns we now call Warkworth and Norham. In the 1820's and 1830's these two settlements sometimes were called Percy North and Percy South or Percy Mills. It was later that they were named Warkworth and Norham.

The village that became Norham was, during the early decades of the 1800's, a bustling community with mills, blacksmith shops, hotels, schools and churches. As the years went by, Warkworth became the larger centre. If you go to Norham, drive around a bit and you will see that there is a grid of streets meant for a much larger community than we see today.

The Old Percy Road

In the early 1800's, two roads went south from Percy, one to Colborne and one to Brighton. The Gravel or The Cramahe Gravel as it was also called, runs from the south west corner of Norham to Morganston, Castleton and eventually to Colborne. The Percy Road ran directly south from the east side of Norham. We can see this today where Platt Street goes south out of Norham and turns into Darling Road which is the boundary between Cramahe and Brighton Townships.

It's not too hard to image how The Percy Road developed to serve both the settlements that grew and prospered to the north of the village of Brighton and the more distant community of Percy. Also, people who lived close to the road or on concession roads that ran off the road would have relied on The Percy Road for their access to Brighton which gradually grew as a commercial centre. In particular, the Port of Brighton was very important as a convenient shipping point for produce such as grain and lumber. Merchants in Brighton prospered as people purchased supplies in Brighton before they traveled back up The Percy Road to their homes.

What was the exact route of The Percy Road? Can we see it today?

A description of The Percy Road can be found in the booklet "Centennial of the Incorporation of the Village of Brighton, 1859 – 1959". The article is called "History of Brighton Township" and was written by the late Fred Wade, a life-long resident of the area. It deals with the communities along The Percy Road. The following is quoted from page 39 and 41:

"Previous to the formation of the said Township of Brighton the main traveled road to the north ran from the west end of Brighton village up the Dutchman's Hill, through Thompkins Corners, past Richmond's saw and plaster mill, through Kankerville and crossing to the E. Cassan field, west by the old ashery to the open road west of the Hilton Cemetery. The four corners was the Hilton of that date (1852) and consisted of a store, tailor shop, wagon shop and blacksmith shop, a hotel at the place now owned by Lloyd Herrington. The school was in a corner of Fred Thorne's field. Another hamlet existed in the four corners north of the Breakaway, with a school, a hotel owned by C. A. Tackaberry, and several lots with buildings on largely occupied by the older Tackaberry's. On down the Three Brothers (Hills) to the Slater Neighborhood, a thriving place – Slater's flour mill, Chet Loomis and J. E. Proctor saw mills and Franklin's woolen mill, blacksmith ship, etc. There was another small hamlet at J. Begg's four corners and then on to Norham."

Let's see if we can recognize these places along The Percy Road in the landscape of today.

" ... from the west end of Brighton village up the Dutchman's Hill... "

As we have already seen, the most southerly part of The Percy Road is the modern Percy Street at the west end of Brighton. Where this street ends in a shady circle, we can see that the old road continued north over the hill - Dutchman's Hill, as Fred Wade tells us. The road is not open now but if we go around to the Little Lake Road, we can see that there is a trail to the south at the intersection of Little Lake Road and Alexander Road. This would be the continuation of Percy Street.

" ... through Thompkins Corners, past Richmond's saw and plaster mill, through Kankerville ... "

Thompkins Corners may, in fact, be the corner of Little Lake Road and Alexander Road. The Richmond mills would have been located near Alexander Road on Butler Creek at Kankerville.

The Old Percy Road



The map on page 257 of the Tobey Book shows two different roads between Brighton and the Fourth Concession Line, now called The Telephone Road. The road labelled as “Brighton and Seymour Gravel” can be seen following much the same route as our current #30 Highway, coming out of Brighton on the east side, going through Spring Valley and swinging north west to Kankerville. It then runs very straight north along the east bank of Butler Creek until it follows Butler Creek to the west and then north through the Henry Nix property, meeting the Fourth Concession Line at Wade’s Corners. We might speculate today that this is the north end of Kilbank Lodge Road where it

stops at the 401 eastbound off ramp to Number 30 Highway. William Wade and George Tobey owned the property which we would describe today as lying south of the Telephone Road and west of Number 30 Highway.

The other road is labelled as “The Old Percy Road” and it takes a different route in this area. We can see this road coming directly north from Brighton and meeting the Brighton and Seymour Gravel at Kankerville. Then, where the other road goes straight north, this one dips east and runs up over the hill and down a valley, edging north and west until it meets the Fourth Concession Line a bit east of Wade’s Corners. Today, we can see the remnants of this route in Tillings Road which turns east off Number 30 and then goes north up the hill, ending at some new homes. This is another section of The Percy Road which is closed in modern times.



Modern highways have changed the landscape in this area making it difficult to imagine that the current Telephone Road, earlier called The Fourth Concession Line, ran straight west to the big hill on the north side of the 401. You can see this from the top of either hill but it’s more obvious from the west side looking back to the east. Drive across the 401 and go up the Telephone Road to the west, then stop and look back across to the east. Imagine the 401 isn’t there and think how the two roads from Brighton would have met the Fourth Concession Road roughly on either side of the site of the old 1867 Restaurant. Today there is some evidence of this where the north end of Kilbank Road meets a remnant of the old Concession Road just west of the parking lot. Near here may be where both The

Percy Road and the Brighton and Seymour Gravel continued north to Hilton.

The Old Percy Road

“... and crossing to the E. Cassan field, west by the old ashery to the open road west of the Hilton Cemetery.”



The Percy Road appears to have taken the same route as the Brighton and Seymour Gravel on its way to the south end of Hilton. The Cassan field would be on the west side of Number 30 Highway a bit north of the 401. The “.. open road west of the Hilton Cemetery ...” is called Richmond Street, named after the Richmond family who owned the lots that contained the southern part of Hilton as well as more land to the west. Today, Richmond Street has some new housing at its southern end and runs on the west side of Hilton Cemetery, continuing north of the Fifth Concession Road which is now called County Road 21.

“The four corners was the Hilton of that date (1852) and consisted of a store, tailor shop, wagon shop and blacksmith shop, a hotel at the place now owned by Lloyd Herrington.”

The intersection of Richmond Street and the Fifth Concession Road was a bustling community in the days when The Percy Road was in full use. The hotel and blacksmith shops, along with a wagon shop would have been important for the constant traffic of farmers, traders and teamsters with wagons full of supplies, produce and people going to Brighton or up into the back concessions.

North of Hilton The Percy Road would have gone directly north and then skirted the eastern edge of Little Lake, running past the two mills that sat on the gravel bank on the north east corner of the lake. Little Lake covered about 100 acres of land to the west of the road and was fairly shallow. The retreat of glaciers many thousands of years ago had left a gravel bank that blocked the melt water and formed a lake. This bank was a handy place to build a couple of mills since there was a ready supply of running water for power.

However, this scene changed forever when, on the rainy night of April 21, 1852, the gravel bank on the north side of the lake gave way under the pressure of rain and spring snow melt. The rush of water demolished everything in its path down the valley to the east including parts of the gravel bank and the two mills. Tragically, two men were killed, both unlucky enough to be working in the mills at the time.

The Tobey Book, page 197, tells us “Two such mills existed about one mile north of Hilton. Each obtained its power from a little lake about three miles in circumference and about 12 feet deep and which had remained in that shape since the days of Noah. A gravel ridge ran east and west on the north side of the lake where the two mills stood.”

When it was over there was no more Little Lake. Where the lake had been was a wasteland and only devastation remained where the flood had torn down the valley. On the segment of the County Atlas Map (above) we can see that the area of Little Lake, almost 30 years later, is indicated by the outline and markings of a swamp which covers parts of the lots of J. Philp, Chas. Fiddick and D. T. Stevens.

The Old Percy Road

John Herrington, aged 31, was one of the men killed in the disaster. He was a son of Jeremiah Herrington who had moved his family from Ameliasburgh Township to the Hilton area in 1841. John had married Louisa Richmond, daughter of Ichabod Richmond and Pamela Bettes and they had three children at the time of his death. The other fatality on that day was Lewis Shearer, age 46, born in the U.S.A., with a wife and eight children, the youngest born in 1850. The Herrington's and Shearer's lived close to each other on The Third Concession east of Hilton.



Arnold Boes was a life-long resident of the Brighton area and lived north of Hilton as a child. He spent many hours scrambling over the gravel banks and exploring the area with his chums. Arnold recounts the story he heard from the old timers regarding Lewis Shearer, one of the unfortunate workers on that night. Apparently the owner of the mill wanted to take advantage of the high level of the water and had scheduled two men to work a night shift in the mill. Shearer was not originally included but one of the fellows did not want to work that night and asked his friend to fill in for him. By this twist of fortune, Lewis Shearer, a father of eight, became one of the fatalities of this violent event.

Further information from Mr. Boes provides a clear idea of the immediate geography at the gravel bank. In fact, there were two parallel gravel banks running east and west with a creek flowing between them. The north bank is obvious today since it makes up the steep bank on the north side of the dry creek bed. On that night in 1852 the deluge cascaded down this creek bed to the valley below and to the east. Mr. Boes says that when he lived there, the Nicol family lived in a house on top of the north bank. The other bank is not obvious today - because it isn't there! More than a century of road building in the area has cut the south gravel bank down to mere remnants which can be seen in two spots, one at the far east end of the open gravel pit and one at the far west end, which appears to be a hill in front of you when you drive down Richmond Street from Hilton and turn 90 degrees west at the bottom of the hill.

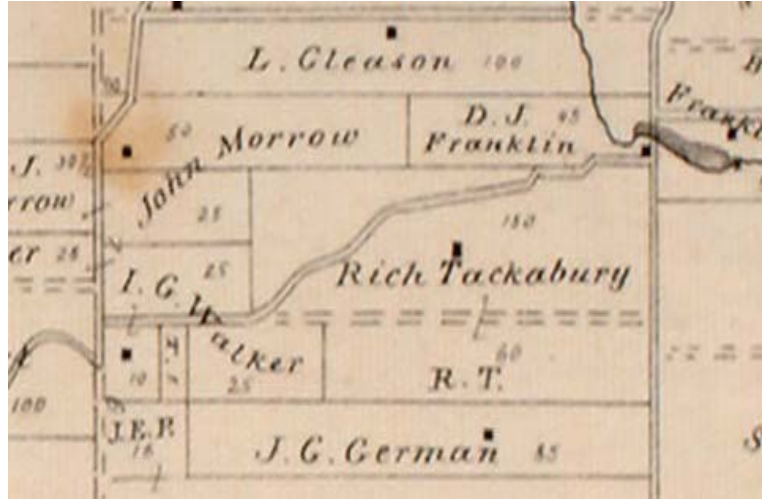
Before "The Breakaway", as the event is often called around the area, the Percy Road came from Hilton and swung east, skirting the end of Little Lake. A cut in the south gravel bank carried the road north across the creek and then it swung up to the east briefly and unto the top of the north gravel bank. From here it went directly west along the top of the north bank past the barnyard of the Nicol's farm and off northwest through the Morrow property. After The Breakaway the road was eventually placed down in the old lake bed so the road from Hilton could go more directly west and north. Today we can see evidence of the old lake bed when the road turns north, if we look through the trees directly west - and down. Then, a little farther along the road to the north, we must climb the shoulder of the north gravel bank to continue on our trek up the Percy Road.

Mr. Boes also pointed out that the Percy Road did not follow the current straight road north of the old lake bed. The map above indicates this as well, showing the curves of the road across the Short property as it approaches the 6th Concession Line. We can see that the road went north and west from somewhere north of the gravel bank. The only evidence of the old road here is a clump of trees in a field just south of the road after it turns west to follow the 6th Concession line. We can see where the road may have met the line and, a bit to the west, we can see a trail heading north where it continued to the next community.

The Old Percy Road

“Another hamlet existed in the four corners north of the Breakaway, with a school, a hotel owned by C. A. Tackaberry, and several lots with buildings on largely occupied by the older Tackaberry’s.”

Today there is little evidence of a community in this area. However, the County Atlas map for this immediate area clearly shows The Percy Road meeting the Sixth Concession line and jogging west briefly before going north and then heading north west across Richard Tackaberry’s property at Concession 6, Lot 6. Census records for 1851 and 1861 show families for Richard as well as Anthony and Nathaniel Tackaberry living in this area. The old road is closed here although local people recall it being open as late as the 1970’s.



“On down the Three Brothers (Hills) to the Slater Neighborhood, a thriving place – Slater’s flour mill, Chet Loomis and J. E. Proctor saw mills and Franklin’s woolen mill, blacksmith shop ... “

Those who have lived in this area in earlier days will know about “The Three Brothers Hill” or just “The Three Brothers” as it was also called. Near the northwest corner of Richard Tackaberry's lot, a series of three steep hills dropped The Percy Road down to the lower ground where Cold Creek flows. We can see evidence of these hills on the map above in the form of large jogs in the road just before the 7th Concession Line. These hills presented a nasty obstacle to travelers who often found themselves getting out of vehicles and walking up or down the steep inclines - and maybe pushing their vehicles. It’s no wonder this part of The Percy Road was closed.

We might wonder about the origin of the name “The Three Brothers”. A theory for this is related to the presence of the Loomis brothers in this area. Page 62 of The Tobey Book contains this item regarding the death of Levi Loomis on April 18, 1853: “The Sentinal of December 9, 1853 states: About forty years ago, the late Mr. Loomis forced his way through the dense forest to a point on Cold Creek near the present western boundary of Brighton Township. There he located himself and carried on lumbering for years.” Chester and Levi Loomis



appear in Cramahe Township census records as early as 1812; brother Richard appears in 1819. The County Atlas map shows Chester Loomis of a later generation living on Concession 7, Lots 9 and 10. Today this land contains The Goodrich-Loomis Conservation Area. Land Registry records for the lots in this immediate area show that the Loomis brothers owned many of these lots at some point or other during the 1820's '30's and 40's. The name was likely applied to those three hills on The Percy Road at a very early time so it's very likely that The Three Brothers were Chester, Levi and Richard Loomis. At least it's fun to speculate.

The Old Percy Road

Benjamin Franklin is shown on the County Atlas map in the southern end of Lot 8, Concession 7 with a branch of Cold Creek flowing through to support the mills. John Slater is just north of Franklin. John Edward Proctor held property and mills in the immediate area as well. He was a member of the Brighton Proctor's who were much involved in commerce, trade and real estate in Brighton Township. Proctor House in Brighton is a wonderful example of the home of a prosperous merchant in the 1860's.

It's a bit tricky following the route of The Percy Road through the Loomis area since the road is not open from the Seventh Concession Road to the bottom of The Three Brothers. However, we can find where it continues if we turn west off Number 30 Highway just south of Orland, onto Goodrich Road, and drive west until we see a side road on the left called Sumach Lane. Sumach Lane is not very long and if we drive to the end of the gravel we can see that the road continues south but is closed to regular traffic. This is where The Percy Road came down from The Three Brothers and continued north into the Loomis area.

We can see this clearly on the segment of the County Atlas map above. The Percy Road comes to The Seventh Concession Line and Ben Franklin's property from Sumach Lane to the south, jogs briefly to the west and goes north where it crosses J. T. Slater's lot. This road is now called the Pinewood School Road, named for a school well to the west in Cramahe Township. In this area, where there may have been as many as 6 mills operating at one time, a bridge crosses Cold Creek, which is well known as a great fly fishing location, as the signs near the bridge suggest. A short way north Loomis Road meets Pinewood School Road from the east, connecting with Number 30 Highway just north of Orland.

Two points are interesting here. First, Cold Creek in this area was ideal for mills because surrounding land was high enough and the creek was deep enough that mills with water wheels could be built and operated here, relatively safe from spring floods. To the east, around the village of Newcomb's Mill's (named after the Newcomb brothers who would later build a mill there) the land was lower and marshy. Here the creek flooded each spring and was a major obstacle to farming and transportation.

Second, the original name for Cold Creek was, in fact, Cole Creek, likely named for Richard Cole who settled on Lot 35, Concession 5, Murray Township, just east of Newcomb's Mills (later renamed Orland) in the mid-1830's. Interestingly, the County Atlas Map (1878) for Brighton Township shows it as "Cole Creek", but the Murray Township map shows "Cold Creek". At some point a consensus evolved for the name Cold Creek.

Continuing north on Pinewood School Road, on the left we see the public entrance to the Goodrich-Loomis Conservation Area, a lovely wooded space where visitors enjoy hiking the trails or fishing in the creek. Just north of here the Pinewood School Road takes a turn to the west and leads us to the Brighton-Cramahe border. If you go far enough to see the sign, you'll have to come back. At some point a little before the Brighton-Cramahe border, a small dirt trail disappears into the bush to the north. This section of The Percy Road is closed now but we can see by the County Atlas map that it continued northwest until it met the line that separated Lot 10 and 11 which in those early days was just a lot line but now serves as part of the border between Brighton and Cramahe Townships. From that point, The Percy Road headed straight north to Percy.

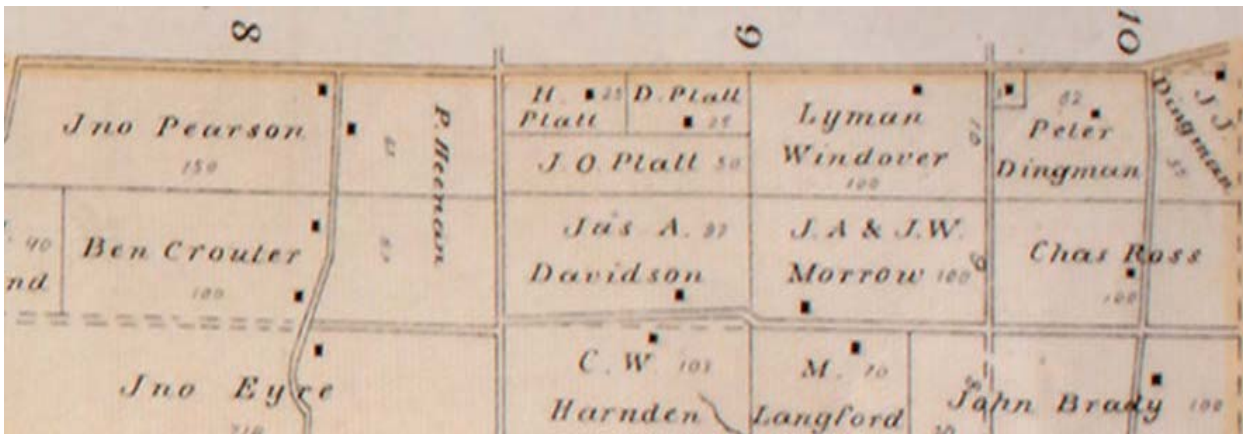


The Old Percy Road

“ ... *There was another small hamlet at J. Begg's four corners and then on to Norham.*”

We can pick up The Percy Road again at Begg's Corners but to get there we need to head back down Pinewood School Road, turn left on Loomis Road, left on Number 30 Highway and left again at County Road 27 just south of Codrington. Begg's Corners is where County Road 27 meets Darling Road from the north. County Road 27, or The Morganston Road, as we knew it when I was growing up at Codrington, provides a link between Codrington and the village of Morganston to the west. We can see this on the map below if we look at Concession 8 where a road comes across the property of John Eyre, Ben Crouter and John Pearson and then meets the township line. That's the Morganston Road and that is Begg's Corners, named after the family of John Begg who lived at Concession 8, Lot 10, Brighton Township. Begg's Road goes south from here but is not maintained; it goes under the large hydro towers that run east and west south of Codrington. On the Cramahe side south of Begg's Corners we can see the Carr Cemetery, an old family cemetery for the numerous Carr families who lived here from the earliest times.

The Percy Road from here travels straight north across Cramahe Hill, named for the township well before 1850 when the lots to the east of the road became part of Brighton Township. In fact, the valley where Codrington lies was called Cramahe Hollow in those days. Early settlers recognized Cramahe Hill as a high, dry plain with fertile soil which was ideal for farming.



Darling Road is the name of this road today and it runs through some very fertile rolling farm land. At Concession 10 to the north, Hutchinson Road runs west from Number 30 Highway and meets Darling Road. At this point the road is called Platt Road and moves off a bit west toward Norham. Just north of there we encounter the Brighton-Percy Border. Not much farther along the sign for the Second Concession Road of Percy appears on the right. Then the road dips into a valley and crosses over Salt Creek. This is Norham, the north end of The Percy Road.

Today, this local section of The Percy Road still provides easy access to Norham for the area residents, but early in the 1800's it was a main highway serving two important roles. First, the local farmers along this road would have relied on this route to travel to Percy Mills, an early name for Norham, to deliver grain to the mills, purchase supplies and go to church and school. Early settlers in this area include the names Carr, Dingman, Palmateer, Bound, Platt, Curtis, Harnden, Strevel, Puffer and others. Second, people in the area would have seen this piece of local road as an important part of The Percy Road, providing them with access to the town and harbour at Brighton as well as all the people, mills, inns, blacksmiths shops and other establishments between Brighton and Percy.

The Old Percy Road

When The Percy Road was in full use, it would have stretched about 23 miles or, in modern measurement, around 37 kilometres. Pavement was unknown in those days and even gravel as a road surface was not common until the 1840's. In its heyday The Percy Road would have been what we would call a dirt trail. Parts of it may have been impassable during the winter or in the spring flooding months. Travelers knew very well what they could expect to encounter on any road in Ontario in those days. The trick was to come prepared with enough strong arms to lift the wagon out of the mire and skilled hands to repair broken wheels.

With all this road to maintain, we might wonder what arrangements were made to keep the path open and passable. Again The Tobey Book provides some answers. On page 104 we see "Roads were still kept in repair by the citizens themselves. In 1831 every male in the assessment roll subject to a tax of less than 25 pounds had to do three days work while property owners had to do from 3 to 12 days work if taxed at a rate of 25 to 50 pounds."

Then on page 216, a later situation is presented. "The Percy and Brighton Road Company owned The Percy Road which is between lots 3 and 4 which runs north of our present Main Street past the lot on which Obadiah Simpson lived and past the brick house amongst the pines known as the Arthur property. The directors of that company in 1851 were Dr. P. Gross of Brighton, Alex Bettes of Brighton, A. F. Maybee of Cramahe Hill, James Lutton of Percy and Comfort Curtis of Percy."

Now that we have seen The Percy Road as it was and as it appears today, how do we explain its decline? Several events and developments in the area provide some answers.

An Act was passed in 1851 in the Legislature of Upper Canada which made various alterations to county boundaries including the creation of Brighton Township, effective on January 1, 1852. The west side of Murray and the east side of Cramahe made up the new township, leaving three municipalities of relatively similar size and population. The old boundary between Murray and Cramahe goes north from Presqu'Isle Bay on Cedar Street, along Prince Edward Street, then Yonge Street in Brighton. It continues more or less straight north and passes just a short distance east of the center of Codrington. The communities of Hilton, Orland and Codrington had been in Cramahe while Smithfield, Carman and Mount Olivet had been in Murray. All of these communities were now in Brighton Township.

The change in municipal organization was mostly due to the growth in population in Cramahe and Murray Townships during the 1830's and 1840's. This growth increasing demand for products such as grain and lumber and this put pressure on local government to improve the winding, hilly roads of the past. Producers and merchants alike were anxious for a quicker and more convenient highway through the new township.

We have already mentioned The Breakaway which happened in 1852 and the nature of The Three Brothers Hill. More people with more horses and more and bigger wagons were just too much for the Old Percy Road. The people demanded something better.

Pieces of road or at least decent trails existed north of Brighton as far as Campbellford. It would take considerable money and effort to make these places passable on a year round basis. The road from Codrington north as far as Campbellford was in use during these years and sections of old road along the Murray/Cramahe border, called "The Town Line" provided useful bypasses around flooding at both Cold Creek and March Creek.

The Old Percy Road

The people got their wish. Brighton Municipal Council contracted with the Presqu'ile Warf and Road Company to build a gravel road from the Warf at Presqu'ile, through Brighton and north all the way to Mallory's Corners which we know as County Road Number 29 or the Warkworth Road. By 1853 the road reached Hilton and in 1856 it stretched all the way to Mallory's Corners.

The new road was called The Brighton and Seymour Gravel Road or sometimes The Brighton Gravel or just The Gravel. Its presence changed the communities along the route in dramatic ways as traffic brought people and business up the road. The Village of Hilton opened its Post Office in 1853 and Codrington followed in 1856.

In the late 1830's the Newcomb family had built a grist mill a mile west on Cold Creek near the Percy Road and in 1869 they brought their expertise in grist milling to the junction of Cold Creek and The Brighton Gravel where they built a new mill. Very soon a village grew up around the mill which appropriately took on the name Newcomb's Mills. In 1874 the village opened its own post office. After the Newcomb's were long gone in 1898 the name of the village was changed to Orland.

Today the communities of Tompkins Corners, Kankerville and Begg's Corners are pleasant farm and residential areas with little sign of the commercial activity of the past. The farming areas to the north and west of Hilton give us little evidence that as many as six mills operated on that ideal section of Cold Creek where the Goodrich-Loomis Conservation Area now provides a beautiful recreation spot for the modern nature lover. Begg's Corners is a quiet intersection surrounded by farms and Norham is a pleasant residential spot that shows evidence of larger ambitions of the past.

On Number 30 Highway we see that the villages of Hilton, Orland and Codrington have evolved through several stages of growth and change. Three historical structures remind us of the more distant past. The Town Hall in Hilton was for many years the place where people gathered. Many couples came to be married, especially in the early days by the local minister, Rev. Joshua Webster. It has served as a dance hall, Scout meeting place and municipal hall for many years. Hopefully the building can be preserved in its present form.

The Mill at Orland is a large landmark which helps define the history of the area. The current building was built after the first mill was destroyed in a frightening conflagration around 1900. It's great to see that this historical icon of the community is still earning its keep. Over the years since that first mill was built in 1869, the village has grown and prospered like the others on the main road, with hotels, blacksmith shops, stores and carriage shops.

The Store in Codrington has relinquished its traditional role as post office and general store but still supports commercial activity as well as providing a familiar visual anchor in the middle of the village, especially for those of us who feel nostalgia for the place. Codrington was a major beneficiary of the increased traffic on the "Brighton and Seymour Gravel". Many different stores, hotels, blacksmith's shops and carriage makers did brisk business at the busy corner from the 1850's well into the 1900's.

The Percy Road was the main transportation route between Brighton Village and Percy Township in the early 1800's when travel was done on foot, on horseback or on heavy wagons driven by teamsters. It was vital to the flow of people and goods in a time of growth and change. We might look back from our modern vantage point and see a bit of irony in the idea that The Percy Road was so successful in helping the young community to prosper in those early decades that it put itself right out of a job. Demand from the people brought another route into play and eventually The Old Percy Road, where it remained open, reverted back to its earliest role of serving local needs.

The Old Percy Road

The Old Percy Road defines an important part of our history. The next time you drive west out of Brighton and see Percy Street, give a thought to the road that served the people who built this community in the earliest times. It's part of your heritage.

The Old Percy Road

Note from the Author

Much of the information related to families in this story can be seen in the form of family history on my web site at www.treesbydan.com. The same data is also published routinely on www.rootsweb.com where anyone can search for a name and find information published by many researchers.

The purpose of publishing in this way is to provide detailed information about local genealogy and history to the widest possible audience. Anyone who is interested in their own family tree can search these web sites.

Everyone should feel free to use any information found in my data on these sites, with the assumption that reference will be made to the source if the information is used in subsequent publications.

Of course, all of this is a work in progress. I am always collecting more information and adding to my database. Corrections and additions are made constantly. Any new information regarding families in the area would be most welcome.

Please feel free to email me at danbuch@rogers.com with comments or information.

No information about living individuals is published on the Web for personal security reasons.