

A Brief History of Hanover

Not only do these words express our feelings at being in this place, at this time, but they echo back through the years, through the mists of time to the very beginnings of our community.

It was over 160 years ago, in the year 1849 that our first pioneer, Abraham Buck, stood on the banks of the Saugeen River and looked about him to behold the thick forest – good hardwood timber - the realm of the deer, the bear and the wolf. The sky was filled with wild pigeons and the streams teamed with fish. It was at this moment that he expressed the famous words written above.

Mr. Buck decided to stay and others were quick to follow. Christian Hassenjager, the first of many German settlers, who was to suggest the name of Hanover; Abram Z. Gottwals, a missionary with the Evangelical Church; Duncan Campbell, who became postmaster; Edward Goodeve, who had one of the first stores; entrepreneurs such as Henry Proctor Adams who built the dam and the first mill and drew up plans for a new proposed village – a man of vision who could foresee the growth of the future; Dr. Landerkin, our first doctor, who let his horse decide which turns to take and ended up in Hanover... and finally, Daniel Knechtel, an eager, hard-working man who arrived in 1864 with a bag of tools on his back and began making furniture in a small barn behind his house. His vision and determination, also, was to guide Hanover for more than a century. Our community grew and prospered because of the struggles of these first pioneers.

By the end of the 19th century, a pattern had emerged. The first influx of German pioneers who had settled in and around Hanover attracted others of that practical hard-working nationality. Led by men such as Daniel Knechtel, Henry Pepler and Jared Spiesz, the village grew and prospered with large factories and new businesses manufacturing various kinds of furniture, knitted goods, cement, milled products and many other items. With industrial and retail expansion came improvements such as better roads, street lighting and facilities for education and recreation. Another sign of this significant progress was the incorporation of Hanover as a town in 1904.

In 1914, “the war to end all wars” began. There was some question of the loyalty of a town like Hanover with its German background, but young men of all nationalities enlisted and fought overseas.

The coming of the railway in the decades between 1880 and 1910 enabled the factories to ship their goods from coast to coast and by the 1920s, the town was becoming noted for its fine furniture and the title of “The Furniture

Capital of Canada” was not undeserved. Following hard on the heels of growth after World War I, were the years of “Depression”. It is fair to say that Hanover did as well as any community in these years and maybe even better than most. The large furniture factories and other associated plants seemed to keep working on, even if it was with a reduced work force.

As the difficult times slowly eased back to normal, the year 1939 brought rumours of war once again. Suddenly, in September of that year, the world was plunged once more into conflict and again, many citizens volunteered for active service for “king and country”. We honour those from the World Wars and all conflicts who paid the ultimate price and did not return to this, their beloved hometown.

The 2nd World War ended with joy and thanksgiving and Hanover moved forward into the 1950s with renewed confidence and vigour. The factories continued to manufacture fine, hardwood furniture, textiles, flour, processed food and kitchen cabinets. Freight and passenger trains arrived and departed at regular intervals, at least six times a day and the rail yard towards the north end of town was a busy, bustling place.

The population grew rapidly as servicemen who had been parted from families were reunited with wives and loved ones. The resulting baby-boom gave the community a younger look as half the town seemed to be kids.

Hanover certainly was becoming a more modern place. Television invaded our homes; dial phones replaced the friendly operators asking for your "Number please?" ; The new "Coliseum" – a gathering place for citizens, events and celebrations was opened in 1963; the milk wagons and horses still plodded from door to door along the shady streets, but this too, would end as the larger grocery stores with refrigeration were opened. New schools and additions were needed to meet the expanding numbers of children and the population of one school in 1959 included 12 sets of twins and 2 sets of triplets.

The decades from 1970 to the year 2000 sadly saw the decline of manufacturing, especially in the large factory settings, as the economy became more global in outlook. The older factories producing hardwood furniture could not immediately compete with the cheaper, imported products. Railway freight began to decrease also, as highways improved and transport trucking along these routes took over. Passenger service by rail ceased in 1970.

Hanover, as a community, however, seemed to pause and regroup and find another way to move forward. Smaller businesses have replaced the giant factory complexes along with expanded service and retail sectors. The town, bolstered by the leadership and vision of its citizens, has initiated many projects over the past two decades. The unused rail lines have become scenic walking trails. The old Knechtel factory on the main street is gone – replaced by the wonderful Heritage Square. The long-standing Carnegie library was expanded to include the Civic Centre, Town Hall and refurbished Library quarters. A new clock tower houses the old post office clock works. An aquatic centre and new arena now grace the south end of town. There, too, beside the hospital built in the 1970s is a new modern health clinic. These amenities have been instrumental in attracting newcomers to the town.

What does the future hold for our community? The challenges do remain. The civic leaders, with careful planning, are determined to keep the town moving forward. Work has begun on a downtown revitalization plan. At the same time, a newly-formed "Heritage Committee" strives for ways to preserve the past.

"Looking forward – looking back." This phrase might aptly sum up the feelings of the people of this town. They remember, some-times with nostalgia, how wonderful it was to grow up and live in Hanover in the years gone by...and...what a wonderful place it still is, especially to the many new citizens who now call it home.

Together, we look to the future with confidence. It is to be hoped the generations of Hanoverians yet to come will also express their happiness and contentment in the words, "It is good for us to be here!"

We are always looking to add to our history. If you have information or a story you wish to share, please do so here.