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Tiny and Penetanguishene: A Major War Hero and His Pioneer Forebears, Part II

By JACK ELLIS

Part I of this two-part series, published in the Fall/Winter 2017 issue of *The Tiny Cottager*, reported on the World War II exploits of Alfred Burke Thompson, the great escaping Thompson.*

The Penetanguishene/Tiny story of the Thompson family begins with William Thompson (1786-1860), who fought as a captain in the War of 1812 at Queenston Heights. He was captured in 1814, but was released and later settled near York (now Toronto). He entered politics and won a seat in the Upper Canada Legislature, in one election defeating William Lyon Mackenzie for a seat.

William Thompson's son, Alfred Andrew Thomson (1813-1885), came to Penetanguishene in 1830 as a teenager. At that time, the settlement consisted mainly of tents and shanties. By 1828 the main British military establishment on the Upper Lakes had moved from Drummond Island to the town, along with families of Métis fur traders allied with the British at Michilimackinac during the War of 1812.

Although the naval base closed in 1834, the military base remained until 1856. Some of the troops settled in the area after their service was complete, providing an English-speaking population.

In the 1840s, French-speaking families from Quebec (mainly from the area immediately east of Montreal), attracted by promises of cheap and fertile land, joined the French-speaking settlers already in recently surveyed Tiny Township, providing much of the population in and around what is now Lafontaine.

Later, as the logging industry began to develop, more English-speaking settlers arrived and Penetanguishene became the local market and meeting place for all these groups of settlers.

Alfred A. Thompson worked for 10 years as an assistant to Andrew Mitchell, Sr., a fur trader on Water Street,

and by 1840 he had prospered sufficiently to build a store and warehouse of his own on the corner of Water and Main Streets. It was then the only market in the area where farmers could sell produce such as butter, eggs, meat, fish, and vegetables for cash to pay their taxes. It still exists, known as the Green Block, a heritage building commemorated by a large wall mural.

Alfred also built the imposing home at 14 Water St. next to the very first solidly built house in the settlement at 12 Water St. His home is now beautifully restored, and has operated as a B&B in summer.

In April 1857, Alfred was appointed as Justice of the Peace for the Tiny area, and was charged by County Council to take a census with a view to incorporation of Penetanguishene as a Village. This was passed, showing a population of 841 within the village limits. In March 1882, the Ontario Legislature made the village a Town, and Alfred became its first mayor.

(Comparable dates for Midland are: 1878, Village; 1890, Town.)

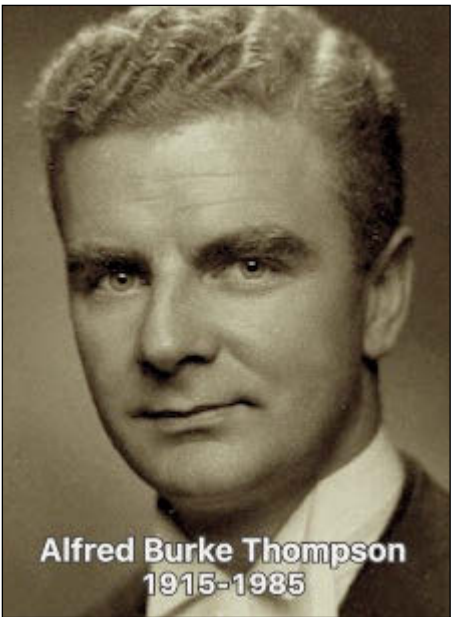
His three sons all became lawyers. Alfred Burke Thompson (1862-1942) was educated at UCC and Osgoode Hall, U of T. He served as an officer in the Queen's Own

Rifles in the Northwest Rebellion of 1885. Thereafter he also had a lengthy political career, serving as Member from Simcoe Centre in the Ontario Legislature from 1898 to 1902 and 1905 to 1919. He subsequently was elected Member from Simcoe East to the Dominion Parliament, serving from 1925 to 1935. His gravestone is in the yard of the Garrison Church on Church St.

The "great escaper" was his grandson.

You can find out lots more about the Thompsons, Penetanguishene and Tiny at the Penetanguishene Centennial Museum and Archives, 13 Burke Street, Penetanguishene.

* Read Part I online at tinycottager.org.



Alfred Burke Thompson
1915-1985

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