

History

The Corporation of the Town of Laurentian Hills was formed through the second round of the Provincial Government's amalgamation process in 2000. The United Townships of Rolph, Buchanan, Wylie and McKay and the Village of Chalk River became one. Below is a brief account of the beginnings of our rich heritage.

The Village of Chalk River

Like most small villages in the Ottawa Valley, Chalk River got its start through the lumber and farming industries. Dating back as far as 1883, the area was known as Coppsville and Clarksville after the two families that owned substantial amounts of land in the area. It is thought that because of the chalk like substance used in logging at the time to square timber, the site of the hewing operation became known as Chalk Bay and expanded to encompass the surrounding area. When the Canadian Pacific Railway pushed its way west, they set up a depot near the settlement and named it the Chalk River Divisional Point around 1880. This depot brought an influx of construction workers and railway employees as C.P.R. expanded their operations for maintenance to their engines and car repairs. Over the years, C.P.R. scaled back their operations with the growth of cheaper transport. Today, the only remnants of the once bustling operations are the electronic switching stations. With the development of the Petawawa Research Forest, Chalk River maintained its growth through the early 1900's and with the growth of the Atomic Energy of Canada site, continued to prosper. With the introduction of Hydro to the area and a need for fire protection services, in 1954, Chalk River became an incorporated village breaking away from Buchanan Township.

The United Townships of Rolph, Buchanan, Wylie and McKay

These four townships were part of an original six including Petawawa and Alice surveyed between 1855 and 1864. Alice Township separated in 1859 and Petawawa separated in 1864.

Rolph Township - Founded in 1855, named after the Honourable John Rolph, MD. He came to Upper Canada in 1812. In 1853, he became president of the Executive Council of the Province of Ontario. He was also the founder of the Toronto School of Medicine. In 1945, construction of the Hydro Dam at Rolphton was started, creating a great influx in the population. In 1950, the Rolphton Dam produced its first power. During construction, a colony, with its own school and church for employees was built and were in service for 45 years. In 1990, the last of the houses were torn down or moved to other areas. Construction of N.P.D. (Nuclear Power Demonstration) began in 1955 and served not only as a nuclear power station but also a training facility for Hydro employees. The main station was shut down in 1987 and most of the buildings demolished by 1994. In 1945, the "Townsite" was being constructed at the south end of the township to house employees who would work at the Chalk River Works, now Chalk River Nuclear Research Laboratories. It was incorporated as the Town of Deep River in 1959.

Buchanan Township - Founded in 1857, named after the Honourable Issac Buchanan, a member of the Legislative Assembly of Canada after 1841. Made up mostly of what is now federally owned property, Buchanan Township has been host to some amazing industries. In 1903, the Militia Department expropriated land from area farmers to build a military camp now known as Base Petawawa. The Landry Crossing Correctional Institute was built in 1961 as a minimum security prison and was closed in 1977. The military currently use it as a training facility. The military requested help to manage their vast

property and so Dominion Forestry began construction in 1918. The Petawawa National Forestry Institute remains one of the oldest forestry research centers in the country. In 1944, the Government of Canada bought out farmers along the Ottawa River to build a Research Centre. On Aug. 6, 1945 the Hon. C.D. Howe, Minister of Supply and Service announced that there would be a plant built on the shores of the Ottawa River which would use X-metal (uranium) and Polmer (heavy water). Chalk River Works, now Chalk River Nuclear Research Laboratories was born and remains one of the areas largest employers.

Wylie Township - Founded in 1864, named after the Honourable James Wylie, a member of the Legislature Council of Canada prior to Confederation. This township, like its neighbours, was well known for its great stands of timber. The Dominion Government in 1918, while constructing its Forestry Station in Buchanan Township, claimed a great portion of the Township for its research. Centre Lake was home to small camps used a make-work camp where unemployed personnel worked for the Dominion Forestry. When war broke out in 1939, the camp was converted to POW Camp #33. Not only did the camp detain POW's, it also detained civilians seen as a danger to the security of the country. All of this was done by the Federal Government under the War Measures Act.

McKay Township - Founded in 1855, named after the Honourable Thomas McKay, M.P. for Russell County in 1835. He was elected to the Legislature Council from 1841 till his death in 1855. A businessman in all aspects, Thomas McKay was not only a lumber baron but also helped build Rideau Canal, was a masonry contractor, a grist mill operator, and he owned a cloth factory. In 1837, the Hon. Thomas McKay built Rideau Hall as a private home and is now the residence of the Governor General of Canada. Today most of McKay Township is used as training grounds for the Canadian Military.

Staying the Run

A History of the United Townships of Rolph, Buchanan, Wylie and McKay

Take a step back in time and travel the paths of history that have taken our district from untouched forest to the nuclear age. Join our forefathers and their families on the United Townships' homesteads. Follow loggers into the tall timber as lumbering opens the doors to trade and industry in the Upper Ottawa Valley. Revisit the development of one of Canada's largest military bases. We'll even take you inside a World War II prisoner of war camp!

Staying the Run: A History of the United Townships of Rolph, Buchanan, Wylie and McKay has been researched and written by Jennifer Mercer. Through interviews, original documents and carefully chosen photographs, she takes the readers from the humble woodsmen who first settled this land to the birth of the nuclear energy industry and beyond.

This book captures our history and preserves our story for future generations.

Available through the Rolph, Buchanan, Wylie and McKay Historical Society and the Point Alexander Public Library.