

JOSEPH KEELER I

Colborne Chronicle Special 125th Anniversary Edition

Published: Wednesday June 27, 1984

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It appears to the writer that "Old Joe" was very much what we would call today an entrepreneur. Aside from being a Loyalist, he was probably a very good practical engineer, as well as a seeker of new horizons and fresh challenges. Not much is known of his early life in Vermont or the problems he may have had after the American Declaration of Independence in 1776.

We do know that, in 1789, he arrived at the foot of "Keeler Creek" and after exploring the area, obviously liked what saw. On his way from Vermont, he probably came back up the Lake Champlain waterway, along the St. Lawrence River (where at that time fellow New Englanders were settling and obtaining grants) and then along through the Quinte area where the same settlement of Loyalists was happening.

Joseph Keeler may well have made more than one trip in his search for the area he could call his new home. Records tell us that in 1793, he arrived at Keeler Creek as the leader of approximately 40 settlers each with the will and determination to form a new settlement in this wilderness, as it was then.

Joseph Keeler's wife, Olive was six years younger than he, and she outlived him by about six years. Their son Joseph A. Keeler, "Young Joe", was born in 1788, barely a year before his father came to Keeler Creek for his first time.

The writer believes that "Old Joe" lived the rest of his life (died 1839) at Keeler Creek, which became officially known as Colborne Harbour. The place has kindly been referred to by many as Cat Hollow and is now generally called Lakeport.



FINAL RESTING PLACE--The Keeler plot is marked with this impressive memorial stone in the Lakeport cemetery.

As mentioned, "Old Joe" was a practical engineer, and two hundred years ago, that meant using streams of water for power to run flour mills, saw mills, woollen mills, tanneries, distilleries, etc., to name a few of the industries of that era. Keeler was involved with several projects of this kind on Keeler Creek in the Lakeport and Colborne areas. Most signs of these have since disappeared, with one exception being the old mill to the west of Colborne, the walls of which are still standing. He was also involved with mills at Salem, Castleton and Norwood and he assisted with a very substantial mill on the Ganaraska for Elias Smith in 1795 at Smith's Creek, which is now Port Hope.

Records say that "Old Joe" built Keeler's Tavern in East Colborne about 1832. This building stands at the north east corner of King and Parliament Streets and is now owned and occupied by Edward Corbier and his family. This inn was a prominent stage coach stop for stages that travelled on the Danforth Road and the York Kingston Road.

Keeler was also largely responsible for the building of shipping docks at the waterfront and road to the north.