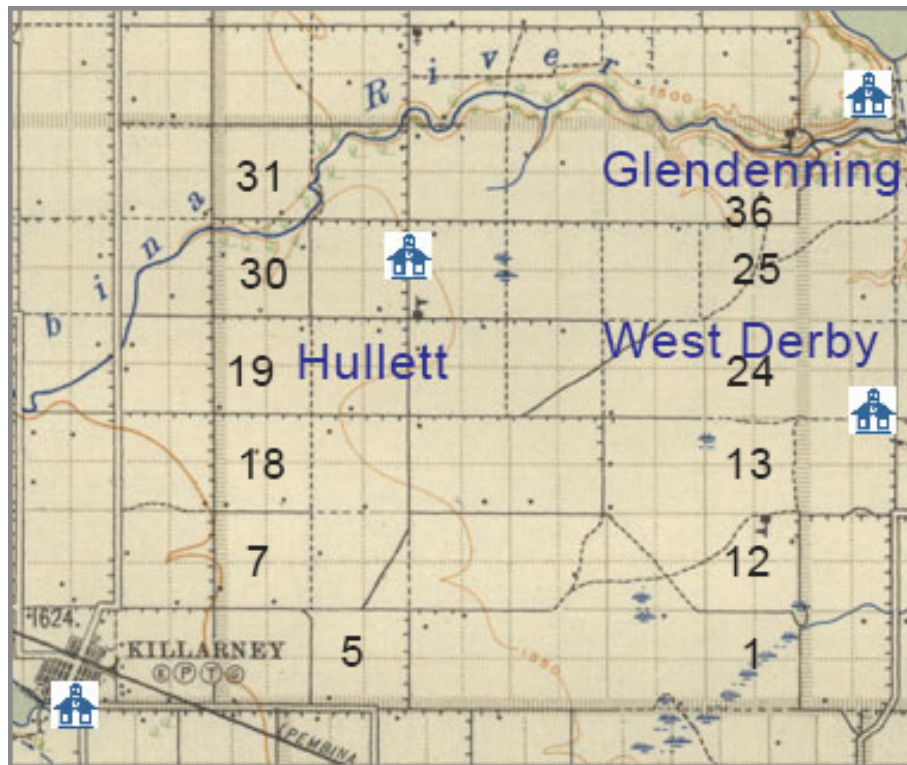


The Hullett District

Adapted from, "Hullett District" by Mrs. M. Christian

The commencement of settlers in what is now know as the Hullett District commenced in the spring of 1881, when two brothers, Peter and Alex Finnen homesteaded on 34-3-16.



Township 3, Range 16 – The Hullett District

In March 1883, Mr. Hobson's family, and the remainder of the Fowler family came, also Mr. William Crawford and Mr. Hicks.

The writer can recall one rather amusing but unpleasant experience to Mr. Hicks who one cold winter day, 35 below, was wending his way to Pelican Lake bush with oxen and sleigh for wood, sitting reading the newspaper and his nose frozen.



The site of Hullett School

In 1884, Mr. Geo. Beacom went to Brandon to meet his future wife, she having the honor of being the first bride in the district.

In the early times Mrs. Fowler was to be found at many a sick bed for miles around and was very often sent for before medical assistance was called. Word of illness in any home was sufficient to cause her to saddle up the old white pony, often in the middle of the night and ride miles over practically unmarked prairie on her mission of helpfulness and service.

Hullett School, built in 1892, so named because several of the early settlers came from Hullett Township, Ontario. The nearest land office in the early days was at Deloraine and several of the first settlers walked from their homesteads and back to file on their land. Up to 1885, Brandon was the nearest railroad.



Hullett School

A Notable Person

The first teacher at Hullett School was Miss Lillian Benyon, from Hartney, who later became Mrs. V. Thomas, a well-known writer and feminist.

In 1905 she joined the Manitoba Weekly Free Press, where she became editor of the Women's Page. Her column "Home Loving Hearts" which she wrote under the pseudonym "Lillian Laurie" provided a forum for the discussion of the problems of rural women, and brought the debate about the rights of women to households across the prairies.

She was one of a group of women, including Nellie McClung, who formed the Political Equality League and fought for, and gained, the right to vote in Manitoba.

The Donnelly Connection

The decision to leave an established home in Ontario or in Britain was not something that was taken lightly, especially if you were established, had a steady job or owned property. It was a gamble and the decision usually would involve a combination of "push" and "pull". "Pull" represents the combinations of forces that are attracting one to the new place. Advertising, reports from friends, the prospect of a good deal. The "Push" is the negative circumstances that one might want to escape. Sometimes that would involve a business failure or a lack of prospects. As an example, many Ontario farmers found that although their farm was sufficient to feed their family and offer a good life, the shortage of good farmland made prospects dim for their children.

And sometimes, there were more pressing circumstances.

First, lets check a bit of Ontario History....

The "Black" Donnellys were an Irish Catholic immigrant family who settled in Biddulph township, Upper Canada, in the 1840s. The family settled on a concession road which became known as the Roman Line due to its high concentration of Irish Catholic immigrants in the predominantly Protestant area. The Donnellys' ongoing feuds with local residents culminated in an attack on the family's homestead by a vigilante mob on 4 February 1880, leaving five of the family dead and their farm burned to the ground. No one was convicted of the murders, despite two trials.

Information about the family and the events surrounding their deaths was suppressed locally for much of the 20th century, due to many residents possibly having ancestors who were involved. In 1995 the Lucan and Area Heritage Society formed to document and preserve local history, and the organization opened the Lucan Area Heritage & Donnelly Museum in 2009.

The story of the "Black" Donnellys has a Killarney connection.

In fact it led to a number of families relocating to the Killarney area. Included in this migration were members of the Blackwell, Fairhall and Hodgins families.

One night in 1875 a rap sounded on their door of the Blackwell home in Lucan Ontario. It was after midnight. The door was barred but, when a voice assured him the visitors were friends, Samuel Blackwell opened it and in stepped Andy Brown, who owed him \$600.00 rent. Andy had eight men with him, their faces blackened with lamp black. In his hand was a rope, which he put around Sam Blackwell's neck and then declared "I want a receipt for \$600.00." Samuel Blackwell could not write a receipt, for he did not know how to write. The ruffians

led him half a mile away to a tree where a halter was put on his neck.

"Mark X on this receipt or we'll hang you by the neck to that apple tree," snarled Andy Brown. Blackwell signed.

When Sam Blackwell took the case to court, Andy Brown swore that he had given the \$600.00 to Mrs. Blackwell and that she had hidden it in the rafters, and he had the receipt to prove it. The Blackwells lost the case.

Later men they believed to be Andy Brown and his gang burned their house and barn. "Father was no coward," asserted his son, "for he met the ruffians as they came away from the barn. Mother rushed back into the house and carried out the Bible that Father had carried in his pocket from Ireland."

Little wonder that the Blackwell family decided to leave Lucan for a more peaceful area.

Robert Blackwell once said that his father would look north at night towards Lucan at the fires lighting the horizon and say "I wonder whose barn is burning tonight."

The violence that seemed rampant in the Lucan area was related to The "Black Donnellys", their feud with other citizens, and their generally lawless behavior. Law enforcement seemed powerless to stop them and eventually in 1880, local vigilantes attacked and killed most of the family. No one was ever convicted.

Another factor in the feuding seems to have been animosity between Catholics and Protestants.

Whatever the reasons for the violence, the Blackwells were certainly encouraged along with a few other families to make their way to the Killarney area and seek a better life. Which is what they did.
