

CULTURAL MOMENT FOR MARCH 9, 2026 CELEBRATES THE STORY OF MOUNT FOREST'S NAMING

The Town of Mount Forest was first settled in the early 1840s, but did you know it was not always known by its current name?

In 1837, the land was being surveyed for the construction of the Garafraxa Road, now known as Highway 6. The surveyor assigned to the task was Charles Rankin. During his work, Rankin made a well-known “digression” around Luther Swamp, travelling northwest to avoid the difficult terrain. His plan was to turn north once the swamps were behind



him. At that turning point, near a river with rapids, Rankin was joined by Chief Nawash, who had travelled south through the forest from his settlement near Owen Sound.

When Rankin asked the name of the river, Chief Nawash told him it was called the Saugeen. Rankin recorded this name on his maps.

After Rankin completed his survey, however, the government determined that his proposed route was too winding and expensive. In 1841, a second surveyor, John McDonald, was sent to re-evaluate the area. Working alone and disregarding the earlier findings of Rankin and Chief Nawash, McDonald mistakenly identified the river as the Maitland River. Based on this error, the land reserved along the river became known as Maitland Hills.

With conflicting reports from two surveyors, the government sent an exploration party down the Saugeen River in 1844 to settle the matter. When the party drifted by Maitland Hills while on the Saugeen River, it confirmed that Rankin and Chief Nawash had been correct in identifying the river. As a result, the village sought a new name.

Surrounded by dense forest and located approximately 430 metres above sea level — making it one of Ontario's higher-elevation communities — the name “Mount Forest” was chosen. In later years, the town adopted its well-known motto, “High, Healthy, Happy,” a nod to its elevated location above sea level.

Submitted by the Wellington North Cultural Roundtable