In 1877 the map of the township of Derby was peppered with Fleming farms around Kilsyth. Alexander and his wife Jean (Stewart), who had immigrated from Perthshire, Scotland, obtained 400 acres of Crown land on Lots 9 and 10, Concession 6 in 1847. They built their shelter, planted crops, brought in live stock and were settled by 1850 with their family of six sons and three daughters. Over the next fifty years, this family established farms and businesses around Kilsyth and were active in the affairs of Derby township. The two oldest boys, John and James, set up a sawmill for themselves and their neighbours. Alexander Sr became the first postmaster in Kilsyth, and he is credited with naming the village. Alexander, a member of the Church of the Disciples of Christ, was also instrumental in building the log church and providing the land. The Flemings were devout and dedicated members and continued in their support for the life of that church. The sons carved out farms on Concessions 6, 7, 8 and 9. John built his brick house Ivy Hill Cottage on the N ½ Lot 10, Concession 6, James had Forest Lawn on the N ½ Lot 9 Concession 6, Donald built The Willows on the South ½ Lot 9 Concession 6, and Charles stayed on the homestead Springfield, Lot 10 Concession 6. William Agnew, who married Jessie Fleming, had parts of lots 7 and 8, Concession 6, and Abraham Finch, who married Isabella, had the N ½ Lot 8 Concession 7 (later bought by his brother-in-law Alexander), and William and Alexander farmed Lot 6, Concession 9 near Keady. Jessie was the first school teacher in 1850 before she married. Donald and William were also school teachers and involved with the Township holding the position of treasurer at various times. William ran a general store with his sister Jennie in Kilsyth, and later Charles, who took over his father’s farm, and Jennie ran a store for several years. All made continuous and extensive contributions to the economy of the village and area.

Christopher Alexander (C.A.) Fleming, the eldest son of John Fleming, became a much-respected educator, accountant, and businessman in Owen Sound. He helped to found and manage the Owen Sound Loan and Savings Company and its transition to the Grey and Bruce Loan and Savings Company, was an auditor for the City of Owen Sound, created the Northern Business College and was the principal, owned the Owen Sound Sun Times, and was an elder of the Church of the Disciples of Christ.

The descendants of this remarkable family are widely dispersed today. However, some remain in Grey County farming and running businesses, proud of their lineage from Alexander and Jean Fleming, early settlers in Derby Township.

Gwen Harris and Ruth Larmour

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