

A- Brighton (Brighton Township)
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Cornerstones

Former inn has rosy past

Second in a series on the old inns of the "old Kingston Road."

In a recent drive along Cty. Rd. 2, I reflected that older-model cars must have run out of gas quite frequently. Either that, or they never did; there are so many former gas station buildings along that road. It seems the first generation of post Second World War drivers had a choice of gasoline filling stations like no generation before or since.

It used to be something like that with refreshment stops for horses, drivers and passengers along the same road.

They are unmistakable, once you know the signs. The old inns along the early, stump-ridden road that linked York (Toronto) with Kingston have a 'look' to them. For one thing, they favour the Georgian or Loyalist architectural style with broad, symmetrical faces. Five windows on the upper storey and four windows and a central front door on the lower. They are never set back very far from the road - are always clearly visible, even from a stagecoach in a snowstorm. Our last "Cornerstones" column described the old Keeler Inn or Tavern at 171 King Street East, at the eastern edge of Colborne.

About three or four miles farther east, at 14596 Cty. Rd. 2, at about the half-way point between downtown Colborne and downtown Brighton, another former inn stands with the same style of face turned to the same road. This is the former Rose Lane Inn.

The first deed to the property was issued to United Empire Loyalist Oliver Campbell, who had petitioned King George III for a grant of land in return for his service on behalf of the Crown in the American War of Independence (1777-1783). The petition for 300 acres was granted May 17, 1802. Apparently, however, the Campbell family did not remain long in this location and the next owner on record is a man named Rosewell Comstock.

Mr. Comstock decided to take advantage of the location of his land on the major east-west travel artery of Upper Canada; he petitioned the Crown for a licence to operate an inn. The cost of the licence was \$10 per year. The first Rose Lane Inn was a log building erected around 1812 to 1815. By 1824, the entry of the property on the assessment rolls for Cramahe Township indicates the presence of a frame house with one additional fireplace - probably this is the first incarnation of the present building.

When Mr. Comstock first operated the Rose Lane Inn, the front door was reached by means of a semicircular drive bounded by rose bushes. Either the bushes, or the given name of the owner, or a combination of both, probably account for the choice of name.

Appropriately enough, "rose-



The former Rose Lane Inn once comforted travellers making the trip from Toronto to Kingston. The inn has seen a lot of owners but little has been done to take away from the heritage look of the building.

head" nails were used in the construction of the house, as a later owner, Clinton McGinnis, discovered while doing extensive restorations and renovations. These nails were individually made prior to 1830 when the era of mass-produced nails began. Five blows of a blacksmith's hammer flattened the head of the red-hot spike as it came from the forge, inadvertently producing a nail head that resembled the head of a rose.

Mr. McGinnis purchased the property in 1989 and restored it to a reasonable approximation of its original appearance, a task which was continued and intensified under later owners, Chris and Laura Campbell. It was Mr. McGinnis's dream to restore the building to its original use, as well. For a time he operated the Loyalist Inn on the premises, a licensed restaurant and bed-and-breakfast establishment.

During his work, Mr. McGinnis discovered the lath for the original plaster had been "accor-

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Doors on the upstairs rooms were made in the old "cross and Bible" pattern, with four panels forming the shape of a cross on the top, over a two-panel open "Bible" on the bottom.

tion-split," a practice he discovered had been discontinued in this area around 1830. It was further proof, in addition to the presence of the aptly-named "rose-head" nails, that the building was a very early one.

and their children found irresistible the opportunity to "immortalize" their initials in the wet plaster. In addition to the Campbells, Mr. Comstock and the LeSieurs, Mr. McGinnis found a man named Jeremiah Wood also owned the property at one time, and also operated it as an inn. Prior to its sale to Mr. McGinnis, the house and farm had been in the ownership of the Branscombe family for generations.

Much of the woodwork still in the house in the early 1990s was found to have been "jack-planed," and it still bore the marks of the plane, visible even under paint. Doors on the upstairs rooms were made in the old "cross and Bible" pattern, with four panels forming the shape of a cross on the top, over a two-panel open "Bible" on the bottom.

The front entrance was a "coffin door," wide enough to allow a coffin and pallbearers to pass through abreast. Side lights and top lights allow sunlight into the wide central hall.

In the 19th century, a large



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shed with three carriage bays was attached to the back of the house, like the New England-style "tails" that are so common in these Loyalist-era dwellings. A rough bedroom, possibly for the hired help, was located in the upper storey of this tail. In his work, Mr. McGinnis found approximately half of the upper storey of the house proper, was originally one large room. This would have been a "ballroom," where entertainment could be held for travellers or members of the local community of Salem, in Cramahe Township.

The wide verandah that graces the front of the old Rose Lane Inn was probably a Victorian addition to the building, which dates back to the pre-Victorian era. At first, the front door may have been sheltered by a much smaller porch, resembling the one on the Keeler Tavern in Colborne, which is a building of a similar vintage. The two old buildings are very alike in their design, even to the 12-over-12-paned sash windows and the detailing on the gable ends.

When he began the work of restoring this old building to its former glory in 1989, Clinton McGinnis faced a great deal of hard work, but he was blessed by one true advantage.

The Branscombe family, who had owned the house and attached farm for 50 years or more before him, had never "modernized" the house out of all recognition.

Although they, and owners before them, had certainly left their traces in the form of layers of wallpaper and linoleum (and indoor plumbing), they had never stripped the place of its original wide-board pine floors or lath-and-plaster interior walls. Much of the interior woodwork remained intact for future generations to appreciate, and the basic symmetrical floorplan of the building - which allows for cross-breezes through its opposing windows and doors - was still much the same as ever.

The rose bushes are gone; Rosewell Comstock is gone. But the old inn remains and, with the care it has received from recent owners, it has a rosy future.

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