

# TRAILS, ROADS & INNS

# INNS & HOTELS

The traveller on the early roads in Upper Canada was not likely to receive more than a bare minimum of comfort. In 1820 'An English Farmer' wrote in *A Few Plain Directions* that

*the innkeepers were too independent in their principles to pay the least attention to the comfort or convenience of their guests. They do not behave even with common civility... The traveller finds himself solitary, unnoticed, and left to supply his own wants... The chief aim of the host is to get the stranger's money; generosity and benevolence are not ingredients in his composition.*

One surviving building on the Danforth Road is said to have provided accommodation for the soldiers of General Brock's army, who walked from Kingston to engage in the Battle of Queenston Heights during the War of 1812. The six-foot fireplace, an inside bakeoven, and a cider mill testify to the inn's purpose as a half-way house for travellers between Kingston and York.

In his book *Six Years in the Bush*, a British traveller, Thomas Need wrote an account of breakfast at the Steamboat Hotel on Cobourg's King St. (renamed the Albion in 1837).

*The breakfast bell was sounded at 7:30 and repeated at 8 o'clock, whereupon there was a general rush from all parts of the house and the neighbouring stores... Instantly the work of destruction commenced – plates rattled, cups and saucers flew about, and knives and forks found their way indifferently into their owners' mouths or the various dishes on the table. There was little talking and less ceremony, – 'I say, Miss', (to the lady in waiting) 'please some tea' – or 'I say, Mister', (to me) 'some steak, I guess I likes it pretty rawish', being the extent of both.*



*The meal was composed of tea, coffee, toast, and bread, and the never-failing buckwheat cakes, with a variety of sweetmeats, crowned with a pièce de résistance in the shape of a huge greasy dish of beef steaks and onions... The company was of a motley description, Yankees and emigrants – washed and unwashed – storekeepers, travelers, and farmers... Ten minutes sufficed for the dispatch of the meal; after which, each and all retired in silence and haste as they had entered, stopping, however, as they passed the bar, for the never-failing dram and cigar, which concludes the business.*

By the end of the 19th century, a different impression of local hospitality is given by a traveller writing about Pickering's Hotel in Baltimore:

*Every prospect pleased. Over to the west a few rods away was the brook, so we could hear the music it made as it hurried on to the lake.*



*The landlord is an expert fisherman, and all that he had – time, horse and carriage, experience, and fishing tackle – were at our disposal... We slept and ate and fished. Our host and his wife, all those about the hotel, and even neighbors did all they could for our enjoyment.*

Credit: [www.hamiltontownship.ca](http://www.hamiltontownship.ca)

## TEMPERANCE HOTELS

As Susanna Moodie commented in the 1830s,

*the frightful vice of drinking prevails throughout the colony to a large extent.*

The prevalence of alcoholic beverages, and the attendant evil of intoxication amongst the inhabitants, led to the creation of the Upper Canada Temperance Society in 1834. Two pledges were available to members: one permitting wine and beer but excluding spirits, and one abstaining from all alcohol except for medicinal reasons.

Women were barred from membership in the Society until the 1860s. Women were, naturally, fearful of staying at hotels, particularly if unaccompanied. They undoubtedly welcomed the opening of Cobourg's St. Lawrence Temperance Hotel in 1859, at the corner of James and Division Streets. The absence of a bar in the hotel ensured their peace and safety. A number of these 'Temperance Houses' in the province offered the traveller "very good accommodation".