



ESQUESING HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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www.hhpl.on.ca/sigs/ehs/home.html

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Silver Creek Hotel
Photograph courtesy of Silver-Wood Women's Institute

In The Early Days – Silver Creek

...Now if I get that far [Silver Creek] and have to put up for the night, I will be doing the same as many another has done in the distant past, for it was one of the rules never to pass “Preston’s Tavern” without calling in. It was one of the most hospitable quarters on the road, made so by he and his little wife, and they were mighty offended if any one passed without calling. Now let it be distinctly understood it was not that they wanted them to spend one penny (or more), it was pure hospitality: he said the same fire would warm 12 as 2 at a big fireplace.

- Lachlin Grant, *The Georgetown Herald*, 18 June 1924.



http://www.boonecountky.org/images/history/large/Florence_toll_gate.jpg

Was our
Toll Gate
rather like
this simple
model
pictured
here in
Kentucky?

Silver Creek Toll Gate

John Mark Rowe

Not a single person recorded an image of the Silver Creek toll gate as a sketch, painting or photograph. A contemporary historian may wonder why such a quaint relic of a less-hurried era wasn't romanticized, rather like the Lower Canada artist Kreigoff did. However, further research reveals the reason why. The people of Esquesing Township hated the thing!

The Toll Gate opened just about the time Silver Creek Village started up. In 1851, the Trafalgar, Esquesing and Erin Road Company completed the planking to the bottom of the Silver Creek hill. A toll gate opened at the top of the hill, beyond which the road was only gravelled for quite a way. Revenue from the gate was transferred to the Company in Oakville to be used in the upkeep of the planked highway and when appropriate, to pay dividends to all the shareholders who had invested in this enterprise. The Silver Creek gate was one of several.



<http://www.permanart.ca/krieg/form/index.html>

With a fine road to use – travel by carriage to Oakville took only 2½ hours – the travellers gladly forked over the required dime. However, this great advance in transportation was overshadowed only five years later when the Grand Trunk Railway opened. Freight travel by road became the exception rather than the rule. Revenues dropped and so did maintenance on the road. The simple log stringers upon which the boards were nailed soon began to rot. Boards broke plunging fragile carriage wheels into a hole which would shatter them, like as not! The broken boards would be flung into the bush, or taken back to be used on the family farm. It was not repaired.

The shareholders found their stock certificates were good only as wallpaper. The toll gates closed one by one and travellers returned to an earlier, harsher era of travel. Within a decade all

the toll gates were gone, save one – Silver Creek. In 1862, Mr. J. Dean was the gate keeper at Silver Creek. He seemed to be very vigilant in his work, as the account books later disclosed. The local newspapers tell the rest of the tale quite well;

1868 An agitation is arising in the upper end of Esquesing, as to the ownership of the toll gate on the 7th Line, between Ballinafad and the railroad and doubts are strongly expressed as to the legality of the gate. The company is long since broken up, but tolls are still collected for the benefit of persons unknown. Mr. Phillips, the Secretary and Treasurer shows by his books a surplus of \$700 which he claims for his own services. No dividend has yet been received by the stockholders, and they are not likely to improve a non-paying road, so that it is in a miserable state. Action should at once be taken... A prominent resident of Esquesing ran the gate a few weeks ago in order to test the question, but no complaint has yet been laid. Who will try it next? (*Canadian Champion*, Oct. 8)

1868 We mentioned lately that Councilor T. Hume had tested the legality of the 7th Line tollgate, Esquesing, by running the gate. The company, after demanding an apology, and getting a blunt refusal, at least mustered up the courage to prosecute. The case was tried in Georgetown before a full bench of Magistrates, and the defendant was fined the nominal sum of 25¢, the company, we are informed, per G. K. Chisholm, promising to continue the road to Ashgrove. (*Canadian Champion*, Nov. 26)

1869 SEVENTH LINE ROAD - It will be seen by an Advertisement in another column to-day that the directors are about to let the Tolls at Silver Creek. This is a step in the right direction and we understand that the directors will shortly advertise for tenders for gravelling the road at least to Stewarttown, and perhaps to Ashgrove. It is devoutly to be wished that our new County Council will at once take up the County road matter and give us at least one leading road through the County... (*Canadian Champion*, Jan. 7)

1869 TOLL-HOUSE BURNED - The toll-house on the 1st line, below Silver Creek, [17 Sideroad] was burned on Thursday night last. It was the work of an incendiary, we learn. The gate had been removed from above Silver Creek to the side road below. Thus intercepting many who otherwise went free to Georgetown, the Rock and the Glen. (*Canadian Champion*, Aug 12)

1870 By-Law passed to gravel, macadamize and grade Trafalgar, Esquesing and Erin road - taxes will be raised. (*Canadian Champion*, March 3)

1876 Halton County Council - looking at abolishing toll gate near Silver Creek - Over past seven years \$5000 received from tolls - all spent to upkeep about eight miles - shareholders have never had a dividend - want some compensation before handing over road to County - gone to committee. (*Acton Free Press*, Feb. 3)

The toll gate on the 7th Line of Esquesing - the only one that has been in existence in Halton for many years - has at last been removed. People may now travel on the only few miles of gravel road in the county without being compelled to stop and fork over half a dime. (*Acton Free Press*, Feb. 17)

Halton County Council - Trafalgar and Esquesing Road Company trustees have handsomely agreed to surrender all claims, and allow the charter to lapse after the 22nd Feb... matter now settled and toll gate removed. (*Acton Free Press*, March 16)

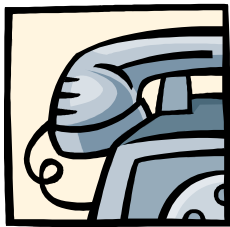
So ended the Silver Creek Toll Gate affair. Somebody kept a large sum of money. We'll probably never know, but if you have any rumours to share, be sure to attend our May meeting!

ESQUESING HISTORICAL SOCIETY SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

- Wed. 12 **Silvercreek!** - The hamlet, the creek, the tavern, the *murder* - all will be exposed at
 May this meeting about a bustling boom town, now relegated to history or paved over by
 2004 Trafalgar Road. Join Mark Rowe as he brings the history of this village to life!
 KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, Georgetown, 7:30 p.m.
- Wed. 9 **Syndicate Housing Heritage Conservation District** - Join the Society on a walking
 June tour of the first Heritage District in Halton Hills and other properties on Bower
 2004 Avenue. This event will begin with our annual pot luck dinner at the old Acton
 Town Hall.
 ACTON TOWN HALL, Willow Street, Acton, 6:00 / 7:15 p.m.
- Wed. 8 **Boston Presbyterian Church** – To be confirmed.
 Sept.
 2004
- Wed. 13 **Barber Paper Mills** – It was 150 years ago that the paper mill produced its first roll
 Oct. of paper. Mark Rowe of Heritage Halton Hills will present his recent designation
 2004 report to outline the history and current status of these buildings.
 KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, Georgetown, 7:30 p.m.

ALL MEETINGS ARE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC AT NO CHARGE!

Please bring your own cup for refreshments to help protect our environment.



ESQUESING HISTORICAL SOCIETY EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

Stephen Blake	905 877-8251	President
Karen Hunter	905 838-2109	Treasurer
Dawn Livingstone	905 877-6506	Secretary
Sherry Westfahl	905 873-7145	Past - President
J. Mark Rowe	905 877-9510	Archivist
Carol Wood	905 873-0792	Publications
Marj Allan	905 877-9985	Membership
Cathy Hunt		Social
Jan Raymond		Social

Society Notes

INTERNET CONNECTIONS

The Esquesing Historical Society has an official web site on the World Wide Web. You can visit us at <www.hhpl.on.ca/sigs/ehs/home.html> Send your e-mail to rowem@aztec-net.com or dlvngstn@stn.net

Canadian Council of Archives web site: <www.CdnCouncilArchives.ca>

EHS NEWSLETTER

John Mark Rowe prepared this newsletter with assistance from Karen Hunter and Dawn Livingstone. Submissions are welcome.

MEMBERSHIP

Our paid 2004 memberships stand at 97. Please encourage friends and family to join the EHS and support our efforts to preserve and share our local history. The individual rate is \$10. The family or institution rate is \$12. Cheques payable to the Society can be mailed to our post box.

Marj Allen, membership secretary, will gladly accept your fees at the next meeting.

ARCHIVES

Sherry continues the enormous task of updating the Archive Finding Aid. The updates are being transferred to the Archival materials by Karen, Dawn and Marj. Many thanks from us all for your hard work. We will all benefit in the future from their diligence.

OAKVILLE HIST. SOCIETY

May 23 & 24 – **The Thomas House** opens for the summer season 1 to 4 p.m.

HALTON-PEEL OGS

The OGS Seminar 2004 takes place May 27 to 30th at Toronto.

From the Halton-Peel Newsletter, Vol XXIX, Issue 1, February 2004:

Harry Grenville Duff Award, Elaine Robinson. Halton-Peel Branch is very please to honour this year's recipient of the Harry Grenville Duff Award, **Elaine Robinson**. Elaine has been a member of Halton-Peel Branch since 1979. Her first executive position was that of Newsletter Editor, which came about when she offered to help the then editor, Trudy Mann and ended up with that position. Elaine likes to kid that she kept Trudy around, since she served as Vice-Chair when Trudy was Chair of Halton-Peel.

In 1984 Elaine became Chair of Halton-Peel Branch, the same year in which we presented our first Seminar, which was held at Erindale College and was called "The Yankees are Coming, the Yankees are Coming". Elaine served as Chair for two years and then moved into the position of Cemetery Co-ordinator. She retired for a while from the Executive, though not from membership in Halton-Peel Branch, and then returned to serve as Program Co-ordinator, Awards Co-ordinator and Strays Co-ordinator, taking over the latter position from the late Harry Berney. Elaine also served on the Editorial Committee which was responsible for re-publishing the 1873-1874 Lynch Directory of the County of Peel.

Elaine has also been active with the Esquesing Historical Society and has written several articles for their

newsletter. She is very involved in Georgetown history and has been a speaker about Georgetown history at various functions. She is the acknowledged expert on the Kennedy family, the founders of Georgetown. In her personal genealogical research she is the expert on the MacKinnon family in Ontario and now on the Isle of Mull as well.

Elaine's interest in things historical also led to her involvement for ten years on the Steering Committee of Heritage Halton Hills, on which she served as Chair for two years. She belongs to numerous genealogical listserves and is always ready to help fellow genealogists with their research problems.

NEW PAMPHLET TO BE LAUNCHED

The newest member of the Esquesing Historical Society pamphlets, *The Hamlet of Silver Creek*, by John Mark Rowe, will be published in May 2004. We hope to have these pamphlets available for sale at the Silver Creek meeting. They will cost only 25 cents each and will make a welcome addition to the pamphlet collection which the EHS has already published. Be certain to check your collection for Acton, Georgetown, Glen Williams, Norval, Stewarttown, Limehouse, Ballinafad, Terra Cotta, Ashgrove, Glen Lawson and Speyside.

JUNE POT LUCK DINNER

The annual pot luck dinner for the Esquesing Historical Society will be held at the Acton Town Hall (upstairs) on Wednesday 9 June at 6 p.m. Bring your dish – salad, main course or dessert

and arrive by six. Bring your own plate, mug and cutlery. The Society will provide juice and coffee. All are welcome, including families for this chance to enjoy an old-fashioned pot luck dinner. This will also be an opportunity to see the interior of the Acton Town Hall. We will gather outside the Hall at 7:15 to begin the walking tour of Bower Avenue. Please note that there are two flights of stairs to be negotiated. There is no fee collected.

NEW HERITAGE HALTON HILLS COMMITTEE APPOINTED

Mayor Rick Bonnett confirmed the Town of Halton Hills Heritage Advisory Committee for the next three years. John Mark Rowe will continue as Chairman of Heritage Halton Hills, with Christine Arbic, Glenn Anderson, Tom Bentley, Peter Berry, Janis Fread, Trevor Raymond, Rick Ruggle, Rein Pater, Councillor Moya Johnson and new members Ann Lawlor and Michael Roy. They meet monthly at the Civic Centre, in the Esquesing Room!

MEMORIES OF MILTON

Author Mel Robinson spent his youth and then his retirement in Milton. For fifteen of the latter years he wrote a weekly column in the *Canadian Champion* recalling Milton's colourful past – people, places, events, seasons. Edited by Jim Dills and Ken Lamb of the Milton Historical Society, it is 218 pages and sells for \$25. Contact the Society at Box 85 Milton, Ontario, L9T 2Y3. Recommended by Chris Raible from the OHS Bulletin.

HERITAGE WEEK QUIZ CONTEST

Congratulations to our two winners: Dawn & Jake Livingstone and Ruth McBride, all of Georgetown. The quiz was quite difficult this year, because of the Military Theme.

1. Identify the Esquesing Village where each of the following Volunteer Militia Companies of Infantry were formed:

- a. Captain John Murray formed 1863 -**Stewarttown**
- b. Captain James Young formed 1863 -**Georgetown**
- c. Captain Joseph Kyle formed 1863 -**Norval**
- d. Captain William Allan formed 1866 -**Acton**

2. What is the present claim to fame of the Acton Drill Shed? **It is the poultry barn for the Acton Fall Fair.**

3. Name three Halton Hills communities which have a cenotaph. **Acton, Georgetown and Glen Williams.**

4. What is the Branch number of the Acton and Georgetown Royal Canadian Legion? **Acton #197; Georgetown #120**

5. Name a building in Halton Hills which is dedicated as a Memorial to war dead. **Limehouse Memorial Hall; Georgetown Memorial Arena; Georgetown Memorial Hospital**

6. Put these six Regimental labels in chronological order: Halton Militia, The Lorne Scots (Peel, Dufferin & Halton Regiment), The Lorne Rifles (Scottish), 20th Halton Battalion of Rifles, 164th (Halton and Dufferin) Battalion, The Halton Rifles.



Acton Drill Shed (Fall Fair Poultry Barn) p946

**Halton Militia – 1846;
The Halton Rifles-1920;
20th Halton Battalion of Rifles –1866;
164th (Halton and Dufferin) Battalion
–1916;
The Lorne Rifles (Scottish) –1931; The
Lorne Scots (Peel, Dufferin & Halton
Regiment) –1936.**

SYNDICATE HOUSING HERITAGE DISTRICT - ACTON

HISTORY

In 1829, the Crown granted the Lot 28, Concession 3, in the Township of Esquesing to the Canada Company. In 1833, Rufus Adams purchased it. Rufus and Maria Adams built their farmhouse at the head of St. Alban's Drive. The orchard lane later became Bower Avenue. The growing Village of Acton did not have a financial institution, so in January 1882, the Acton Banking Company was formed with industrialist William H. Storey, merchants Christie & Company and David Henderson as bankers. They may have bought debentures from the Village Reeve to finance the proposed Town Hall.



In February 1882, Messrs. Christie & Henderson surveyed their property on Bower Ave. and Willow Street into village lots. A street was surveyed to run from Bower Ave. To Henderson's pond and an alley ran along the rear of the lots. The new street was called Alice and the alley Accommodation. Worker housing was in great demand. Beardmore Tannery announced in March that they would need about 50 tenement houses for their employees. These developments may have prompted the principals of the Acton Banking Company to form the Acton Building Association. William H. Storey was the President of the Association and in contrast to the fumbling progress of the Town Hall, these ten tenements were built without delay and of excellent workmanship. William Firstbrook of Toronto was engaged as contractor and work began in the summer of 1882. The *Acton Free Press* announced in October that the brickwork was almost done.

By the end of November they were ready for occupants. The newspaper placed the cost of building the ten units at \$7500.

In the book, *Acton's Early Days*, newspaper editor Henry P. Moore noted;

All the houses are now owned by private parties, and nearly all are occupied by the owners. There have been the scenes of much happy home life, and will continue to be. They have housed preachers and teachers; business men and professionals; manufacturers and employees; tradespeople and retired folk; young and old; none excessively rich, and no needy poor. Many citizens of high character have had them for home; and never was there a man arrested there for crime in the all the years.

Originally rented, they are now all free-hold tenure homes, situated on the original lots. All have been altered from the original in varying degrees.

TOUR BOWER AVENUE

John Mark Rowe in his capacity of Chair of Heritage Halton Hills will give a walking Tour of Bower Avenue, based on the recent inventory of buildings completed by Heritage Halton Hills. The Syndicate Houses, soon to be a Heritage Conservation District, will be a highlight of the tour. The Tour is free and all are welcome.

supplied by J.B. MacKenzie (who owned the lumber yard on Church St.). The downstairs features mahogany trim and two sets of pocket doors in the living room, beveled stained glass windows in the living room, den, dining room and stairwell, solid oak trim in the dining room and a solid oak staircase. During renovations, the current owners found coins that were used as currency in Henderson's store.



#29 Bower Avenue was built in 1910 by John Cameron for Charles C. Henderson who owned Henderson & Co. They were general merchants at the current location of the Bank of Montreal. It Purchased by the United Church in 1928 for \$6000 and used as the parsonage. The present owners Doug & Janis Fread purchased it in 1973. Much of the mill work in this house was



BOWER AVENUE INVENTORY

115 Bower Avenue, Acton, Ontario. L7J 1E4



Built: 1879-1884
Style: Gothic Revival

Block:Plan 227

Lot:131

Assess. Roll No.:24-15-050-002-154-00

Picture Ref:Bower115-01.jpeg

References: 1) Notes of Dr. George Elliot 2) Acton's Early Days 3) National Archives of Canada: Fire Insurance Plans of 1922/34 4) Town of Halton Hills: 2001 Assesment Rolls

Architectural Features:

This house was most likely originally constructed in the Gothic Revival style of architecture which was popular during the mid to late 19th century. The style was promoted by The Canada Farmer around around 1865 as a "cheap country dwelling house". It has been altered since first erected with the addition of an enclosed porch. The only features which have remained unchanged over the years are the sharply pitched gable on the roof and the arched window on the second floor.

Historical Information:

Isaac Francis purchased this lot in between the homes of Josiah Adams and Thomas Moore. Acton's Early Days describes Isaac Francis as a good loyal citizen of Acton and trumps his many contributions to the community. Isaac and his family lived here until they moved to a larger home on Willow St. many years later.

Current\Original Owners:

Original Owner - Isaac Francis

Current Owner - Robert Daigneault