

In early times, Nilestown was called York's Corners, after Mr. York, who owned the first blacksmith shop, situated east on the Hamilton Road. It was later named Nilestown after Mr. William Niles, who lived east of the village where Mr. Cosford now lives (formerly the Piggott property) at #2884 Hamilton Road. In 1820, Mr. William Niles came from Detroit to purchase lumber for General Cass of the American Army. Later he returned to Dorchester and married Miss Dygert, sister-in-law of William Putnam, and bought the land now owned by Mr. Cosford. He was a most prominent resident. In 1842, he was councilor of the London District and Warden from 1847 until 1853. In 1853, Middlesex proper was divided into two Representative Districts and in the election of 1854, he was elected Member of Parliament for the East Riding and was a member of the Quarter Session Court. About 1860, when political strife across the country made it necessary that the Governor-General visit the Council to settle affairs, Lord Elgin, who was the Governor-General at the time, made his headquarters at Nilestown, staying with Mr. William Niles.

William Niles was also Town Reeve for Dorchester Township. He proposed the design for the Township seal with the motto "Industry Dorchester Municipality." It was adopted as the seal of the Corporation and continued in use to the present day.

There was a thriving business section behind the William Niles farm. This consisted of a carding mill and a fulling mill, a pea mill, an oatmeal mill, flour and grist mill, and a sawmill. There was also a store and a cooper shop all down over the steep hill to the river. Messrs. Pierson and Wilson built the flour mill which was known as the Willow Dell Mills. The toll for grinding was one bushel in twelve. The mill was later owned by Henry Niles, Alex Leith and John Creighton. It was under the operation of John Creighton in 1902 when the mill burned.

In February 1891, according to the Raymond Crinklaw Collections, an interesting evening took place in the Nilestown Masonic Hall, when 74-year old Mr. Alex Leith, the oatmiller of Willow Dell Mills told of his early life experiences. Coming from Aberdeen, Scotland, he settled near Belleville, was married, got gold fever, and went to California, where many hardships were endured in the mines. From there he went to Australia to find success in gold diggings there. Then he came home via England to see his parents in Scotland and back to Canada to his wife and two children, after an absence of six years. The article also mentions he was a member of the Methodist church in Nilestown and also Superintendent of the local Sunday School.