

# The Acton Free Press

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Second Section

## Credit Conservation Authority preserves remnants of once-thriving limestone industry

By Joan Rollings

History, which dates back to the early 1800's in the quiet village of Limehouse, may repeat itself if plans of the Credit Valley Conservation Authority are carried to completion in the next few years.

The Authority has acquired approximately 200 acres on the edge of the village containing the remains of the thriving limestone industry which originally cradled the area. Limestone is still quarried near neighboring Acton but the quarries at Limehouse are long since quiet spots overgrown with sumac, weeds and cedar. Picturesque stone kilns are the monuments to past activity and the Black Creek chatters through an open cut where once a mill stood.

Until 1805 the land belonged to the Mississauga Indians, as much of the Credit River Watershed did at one time. As the press of settlers increased, the government of Upper Canada purchased what is now Esquesing Township from the Indians.

During the next 14 years George Black surveyed the township and after 1819 settlers pushed into the newly opened land. A wily Highlander, Mr. Black's efficiency was matched only by his fierce national pride and religious zeal. A story is told of Mr. Black who as a lay preacher of the local Presbyterians, led his flock in copious prayers ending each with the request that the local Irish remain "hewers of wood and drawers of water" for "Thy own appointed people," the Scottish Highlanders.

First settler in the Limehouse area was Adam Stull who obtained a Crown Deed to Lot 22, Concession 6 in 1820. The first registered private sale at Limehouse was from Mr. Stull in 1841 to Ninian Lindsay who started the lime industry there.

Settlers in the northern section of the township were generally sympathetic to the grievances of the rebels led by William Lyon Mackenzie in 1837 but were not prepared to join Mackenzie in his attempt to overthrow the government and secede from the Empire.

A farmer, Allan MacPherson, who lived south of Limehouse, was one of Mackenzie's lieutenants and, in his flight from the authorities, was hidden in the home of Joseph Standish where the first township council met in 1821.

During the day Mr. Standish searched for rebels and at night talked long hours with Mr. MacPherson about the political situation in Upper Canada. In succeeding years, when

asked why he had hidden the man, Mr. Standish exhibited the profound logic of our pioneering ancestors when he said, "MacPherson would have done the same for me."

For many years the people of this area continued to be moderately radical in their political views. After Halton County separated from Wentworth in 1853, John White, a Liberal, was M.P. almost continuously for 20 years. In 1873 however, the citizens of Limehouse, following the prevailing obsession, voted against Mr. White and elected an Independent Temperance candidate. Newspaper accounts of the following celebrations show that at least for one night the Temperance workers definitely forgot their principles.

Religion played an important part in the lives of the early settlers, as it did across the country. In Limehouse in 1832 John Meredith deeded two acres for two pounds, ten shillings to the Calvinistic Presbyterian Church. This provided a site for a church and cemetery for many of the early settlers were Scots.

A church was not erected there until 1861 and then as a result of a combined effort by the Presbyterians, Episcopalians and Episcopal Methodists. In the years before residents attended church at Boston or Acton, local Presbyterians note with pride that although the founding of Georgetown congregations predates that of Limehouse, the Limehouse Presbyterians sponsored the first similar congregation at Georgetown.

In 1876 a Mr. Gowdy Sr. deeded the land for a local Methodist Church. George Grant built the church with the help of Charles and Sam Meredith. They built well for the building is still used as the Limehouse Memorial Hall. Rev. John Lynch was the first Methodist minister.

The Village of Limehouse grew slowly. Building lots were not surveyed until 1856-58 and by 1861 there were only 17 registered landowners in the village. Prior to 1840 the area was by lot and concession number; then it became the village of Fountain Green. This name remained until 1857 when the Post Office Department renamed it Limehouse and opened the first Post Office in the Village.

In 1856 the main line of the Grand Trunk Railway, now the CNR, pushed a line through a cut blasted in the limestone. During the construction a temporary settlement of 200 workers and their families lived at Limehouse. One of the local

legends tells of a construction worker, a little worse for an afternoon in the tavern, who sat on a keg of powder and lit the fuse, blowing himself to the top of the cut. He must have survived the accident for there is no report of a fatality.

In the late 1800's Limehouse was a booming community with at least three hotels, three stores, two quarries, several mills and a prospering lime industry. During the building of the railway a hotel was operated in the Mitchell residence on the fifth concession.

In 1871 Miles McDonnell operated the Limehouse Inn and a third hotel was built by Thomas Fraser. The village blacksmith, the first was Robert Forst, was an important individual in pioneering days. Milling provided employment for many citizens. At least three mills were in existence on Black Creek between the old mill pond, which extended north-west of the fifth concession, and the railway. One mill produced water-lime for cement for all the railroad bridges. This mill later became a lumber and grist mill. There was also a woolen mill and a paint and lumber mill.

In 1862 John Newton built his woolen mill which was known eventually as the Empire Blanket Company. Raw materials from local sources were used and payment in many cases was made in blankets.

In 1872 a fire-proof paint industry began under the direction of Meikle, Newton and Company. James Newton, oldest son of the founder, became sole owner of the business. Blue and red clays were extracted from Lot 22, Concession 7, Esquesing Township, directly south-east of the Limehouse Union or Presbyterian Church. The six colors produced were exported to the United States, Great Britain and Australia.

According to an article in the Acton Free Press on May 29, 1930, Beardmore and Company wished to repaint their buildings one spring. Samples were obtained from several companies and the final decision was to order the paint from Philadelphia. When the order was filled from the United States it bore the inscription "Manufactured by J. Newton, Limehouse, Canada."

An English settler in Limehouse had the same experience when ordering paint from England.

In 1893 fire struck and destroyed both the woolen mill and the paint and lumber mill. For a time it was feared the village would burn but the rapid arrival of the horse-drawn fire engine from Georgetown saved it. Lack of sufficient insurance to rebuild the mills

marked the beginning of the end for the village.

On the property south of the tracks, now owned by the Credit Valley Conservation Authority, there remains seven kilns and a draw kiln. Limestone was taken from the quarry west of these kilns and drawn from there to the kilns by horse and cart. Besides these kilns there is a limestone powder house and the foundation of the old water-lime mill which was torn down. At the height of production in the 1880's and 90's the kilns were operating 24 hours a day, employing 100 men and producing about 70,000 bushels of lump lime and 6,000 barrels of water lime per year.

Mention has been made of the kilns where limestone was "cooked" to produce lime. The set kilns were short, squat structures. Several cords of wood were placed from the top into the kiln's mouth. Then limestone would be placed on top of the wood, covered with blue clay, the fire lit and the limestone cooked for five or six days. When the process was finished the lime was taken out of the fire hole in the bottom.

A draw kiln was far more efficient. Wood was placed in this type through fire holes at either side to the level of a grate which separated the wood from the limestone. The stone was placed in from the top. The cooking took about three days and after that lump lime could be drawn away about every five or six hours. Local wood was used at first to fire these kilns but eventually had to be imported into the area.

The entire lime operation ceased at Limehouse about 1917, largely due to the danger of blasting in the confined area. One drill hole may still be seen on top of the quarry wall. With the ceasing of lime operations the last large industry ended in Limehouse. The village then receded to its present quiet, rural atmosphere.

G. S. Goodhew compiled a history of Limehouse several years ago and the author wishes to acknowledge the research done by Mr. Goodhew.

There are no immediate plans for re-activating the quarries but the Authority acquired the land as part of its conservation program.



LOOKING LIKE several oddly-constructed beehives, these kilns provided employment for more than 100 men when this picture was taken about 1900. Limestone was blasted from the nearby quarry and drawn to the kilns by horse and wagon. Here it was fired into lime for many uses in early Ontario.



CRUMBLING REMAINS of a once thriving industry stand beside the CNR tracks west of Georgetown at Limehouse. These kilns, where the limestone was fired, provided employment for many workers and gave Limehouse its name. (CVCA Photo by Joan Rollings)

### Deputy clerk C. McKay begins work April 3rd

Halton County's new deputy clerk Claire McKay will begin work on April 3.

Mr. McKay, currently deputy clerk for King Township, will take over the duties of former deputy clerk James Andrews.

Mr. McKay is married and has five children. He was selected from 25 applicants, five of whom were interviewed. His starting salary was set at \$6,030.

### Reserve decision nurse certification

The Ontario Labor Relations Board has reserved a decision on an application last week for certification by the Halton Public Health Nurses of Halton Health Unit. The hearing was held Wednesday morning of last week in Toronto.

There are 22 nurses in the group and they were told by Halton County Council that no further negotiations could take place until they are certified by the OLRB.

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Dividend

J. S. Beatty, general manager of Halton and Peel Trust and Savings Company reports a regular quarterly dividend of 10 per cent per share is payable to shareholders, April 14, 1967.

At a meeting of the directors recently a two and one-half cents per share bonus was also declared, to be paid the same date.

All persons holding recorded shares as of March 31, 1967 will receive the dividends.

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ONE LARGE KILN remains intact on the Limehouse property recently acquired by the Credit Valley Conservation Authority. Here the lime was processed, giving employment to many and a name to nearby Limehouse. (CVCA Photo by Joan Rollings)

Seek co-ordination of welfare agencies

A.C.C.E.S.S. — The Area wide Council for the Co-ordination and Expansion of Social Services, may be formed in South-eastern Ontario.

The organization, intended to co-ordinate welfare agencies in parts of five counties, was proposed last week by a report sponsored by The Ontario Welfare Council. Halton would be included with all communities between Hamilton and Oshawa.

Released by Anthony Adamson, chairman of the multi-community study committee, the report suggested the unit be established to plan fund raising project and welfare services in the area and eliminate discouraging confusion now prevalent.

It is expected the communal plan will be legislated in the spring of 1968 at the earliest.

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