

# Looking back

*Legion building was once a livery stables*



J. A. WILLOUGHBY'S LIVERY STABLES

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In the fall issue of *Sideroads of Halton Hills*, the Halton Hills Heritage Signage Program was highlighted. While these signs certainly promote public awareness of the Town's heritage resources, there are also many historical locations in our community that go unnoticed.

The Legion in downtown Georgetown is such an example.

Located at 127 Mill Street, Royal Canadian Legion Branch 120 is, from the exterior, an unassuming structure. Though the Legion members today ensure a very lively location, the exterior of the building does not speak to its colourful past or the people involved with it.

The area around Mill and Main Street served as a livery and stables as early as 1867. After going through a number of owners, the business was eventually purchased in 1901 by John A. Willoughby.

Part of the livery business was a 'bus' service which carried passengers between the railroad station and the downtown area's local hotel and businesses. The bus was a great success, taking advantage of the expanding railway service to Georgetown station as the main junction of the Grand Trunk and Hamilton & North West Railways.

By 1906, the business was doing so well that Willoughby needed to expand and erect more permanent stables. This construction was quite the development for the local community and warranted an article in the *Georgetown Herald* on December 17, 1913:

*The building...is one of the finest stables in Ontario devoted to a livery business. 111 x 80 feet is the size of the building, and of two storeys. These are stalls for thirty horses and store room for carriages galore. The stalls are fitted up with Tisdale iron stable fittings; a litter carrier is in operation, and the result is a perfectly clean and neat stable. Apart from the large stone structure there are numerous*

*sheds for housing vehicles....Mr. Willoughby does a large livery business with his 21 horses, in addition to operating a bus to and from all passenger trains stopping at Georgetown station.*

Today, the Legion is housed in this building. If the current stucco facade were to be peeled away, it would reveal the proud stone structure as seen in the photos on this page.

John Willoughby was elected to municipal council in 1904, serving as Reeve of Georgetown from 1905 to 1908. His business efforts also involved the establishment of the Georgetown Coated Paper Mills in 1910. His company was purchased by Domtar, where he served as the company's first president.

Willoughby eventually became involved in real estate, selling the stables in 1916. His firm settled much of the railway lands west of Toronto and was a

precursor agency of what is known today as Royal LePage.

Of note, one of Willoughby's livery drivers in 1909 was William H. Wright.

Wright would go on to become a prospector striking it rich in the Kirkland Lake region. As well as becoming a millionaire in the mining industry, he became a notable horse breeder and founder of *The Globe and Mail* in 1936, which became Canada's first national newspaper.

The livery barn and stable was sold at auction on March 17, 1926 and would eventually become the home of Branch 120 following the Second World War.

This is just a glimpse into our community's hidden history and the rich heritage that surrounds us in Halton Hills.



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