

The Villages of Halton Hills

Stewarttown nestles between two hills

The following is the fifth article in a series on the history of the villages and hamlets which make up the Town of Halton Hills, published irregularly in The New Tanner during the summer months. Much of the material comes from the Halton Atlas, first published in 1877. A number of other sources including family histories and books such as Halton's Pages of the Past by the late Gwendolyn Clarke, Halton Sketches by John McDonald and various books and pamphlets by local historian Mark Rowe. This week's article centres on Stewarttown, a hamlet almost swallowed now by Georgetown, but once the busy capital of Esquesing Township.

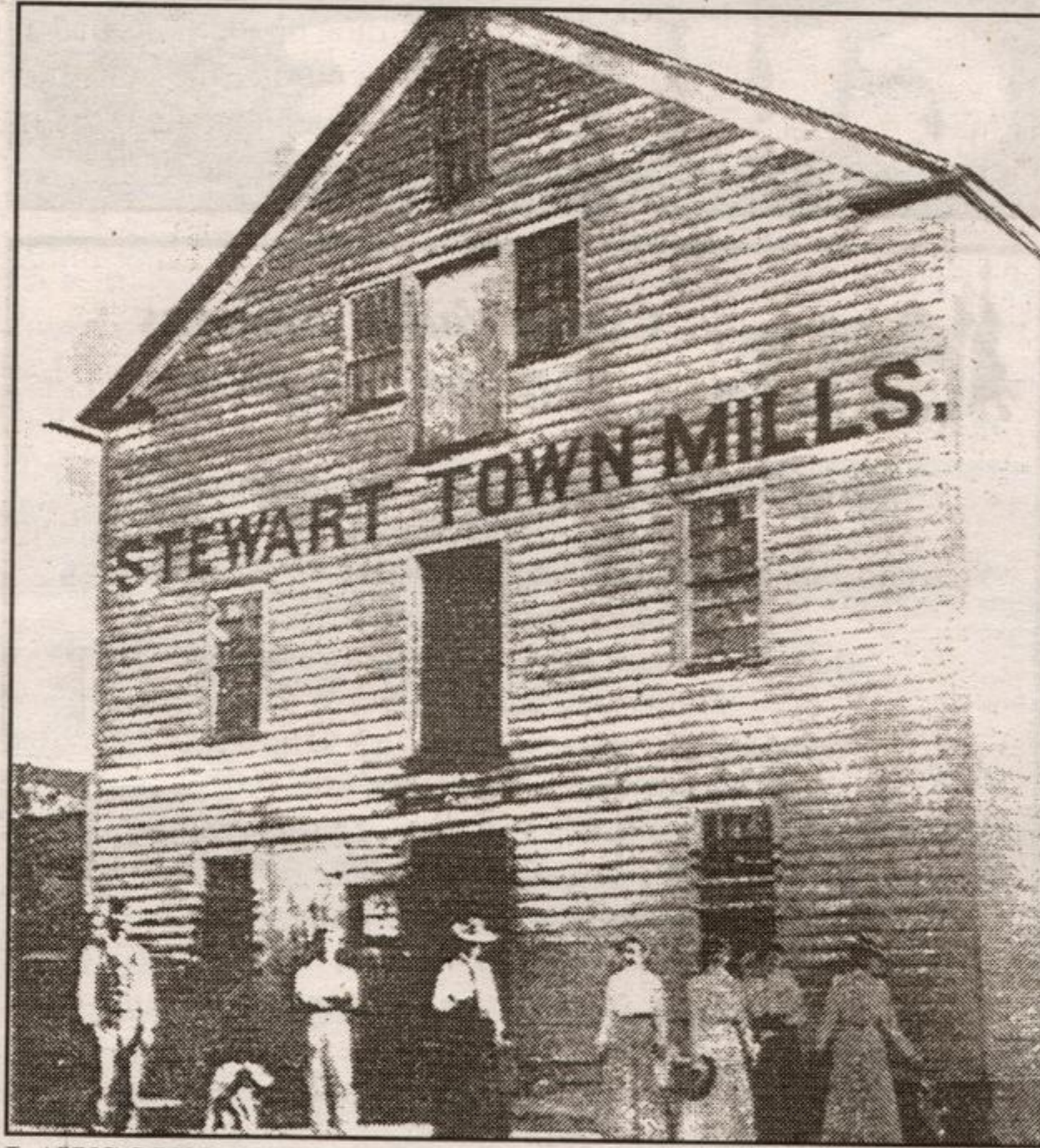
Stewarttown, on the Seventh Line (now called Frafalgar Road) dates back 186 years to 1818. Nestling between two hills on the west branch of the Credit River (Black Creek) it derives its name from the Stewart brothers, John and Duncan, who were the first to take advantage of the abundant water. They built a dam and built a saw mill

and a grist mill in 1820, an enterprise taken over by the Lawson family who operated it for almost a century.

The first settlers in the Township of Esquesing are believed to have settled in Stewarttown and area, many of them from Scotland. It wasn't long until they saw the need for some form of governance in a province dominated by the Family Compact, an oligarchy of wealthy families who, like Upper Canada's first governor, Lord Simcoe, intended to make the vast wilderness a carbon copy of the political class system in Great Britain.

Gwendolyn Clarke in her informative book, Halton's Pages of the Past, records that the first organized attempt at local governance was a meeting of ratepayers at the farm home of Joseph Standish at Lot 13, 6th Concession on New Year's Day, 1821. At this time the townships were governed by the "Justices in Session," and continued until the passing of the Municipal Act of 1849 (known as the Baldwin Act.)

So the first meeting at Stewarttown was staged under a warrant signed by



LAWSON'S MILL in Stewarttown is shown in this reproduction of an old photo taken before the Mill burned down in 1906. In the picture, from left to right, are Mr. and Mrs. Walter Lawson Sr., Misses Hettie, Mary, and Jane Lawson and Miss Pearl Richardson. Notice the spelling of "Stewart Town" on the mill front.

William Thompson and F.S. Jarvis, Justices for the Home County, of which Halton was a part. The following officers were installed: James Frazer, township clerk; Joseph Standish and Thomas Barbour, assessors; Charles

Kennedy and John Stewart, town wardens; Thomas Fyfe, collector.

Meetings were held at the Standish home until Thomas Thompson opened a tavern on Lot 13, west, on the seventh Line. It was dubbed "Long Tom's Tavern" and was also chosen for township meetings where the chief business was to define and settle disputes over fences, appoint pathmasters and supervise the registration of cattle marks to counter rustling. When township business was concluded it was customary to retire to the bar room for a social time.

Often social times led to arguments and the discussions became violent especially after the Rebellion of 1837 when both sides has strong opinions. Neighbouring Scotch Block and many Esquesing farmers supported the efforts of fiery William Lyon Mackenzie to attain representative government. But the township also had many loyal Tories and Mackenzie admirers who drew the line at rebellion. A Stewarttown blacksmith

shop was a meeting place for the rebels. They were rumoured to have fashioned spikes and spears there should a display of force be necessary.

The Stewarttown Drill Shed, however, was also the headquarters of No. 2 Company, 20th Battalion, under the command of Captain Applebe, a force to be reckoned with should local people resort to violence.

Around 1850 Stewarttown was a thriving village with three hotels, a tannery, saddle and harness maker, saddler, furniture making business, as well as a blacksmith shop and merchants' shops. However, when the Grand Trunk Railway built their main line through Georgetown and Acton, business followed the railway, and Stewarttown's decline began although it remained the capital of Esquesing. Eventually a council chamber was rented from a company which built a brick store with living quarters and a hall overhead in hopes of selling it to council.

No such luck. Council just rented part of it. Since the top floor was used for dances and community events it became known as the Community Hall. It wasn't until 1948 that the building was remodelled and included council chambers, a township clerk's office and community hall. It was in use until 1973 when Esquesing was collected into the arms of the

new Town of Halton Hills. A number of businesses occupied the building until Georgetown Little Theatre purchased it for their use. Fire destroyed it five years ago and a modern new brick facade building replaced it.

Esquesing's first post office opened near Stewarttown in 1820 and given the name of the township - Esquesing - a word borrowed from the native people which means "Land of the Tall Pines" or as others contend "Land Between the Rivers" Someone ask the Indians. The post office moved to the village in 1840 and remained in operation until 1900 when Stewarttown got rural mail delivery from Georgetown.

Although a grist and flour mill had much to do with Stewarttown, the area was also a hive of industry for hop-growing. For many farmers it was the main crop and hop picking became an industry which gave employment to "considerable numbers of people". However, the bottom dropped out of the market when brewers began to use substitutes for hops.

Although brick-making was never a commercial enterprise, quite a number of homes, the school and the original community hall were fashioned from hand-pressed brick made from clay found in the area. There's been a school in Stewarttown since 1890

Continued on page 16

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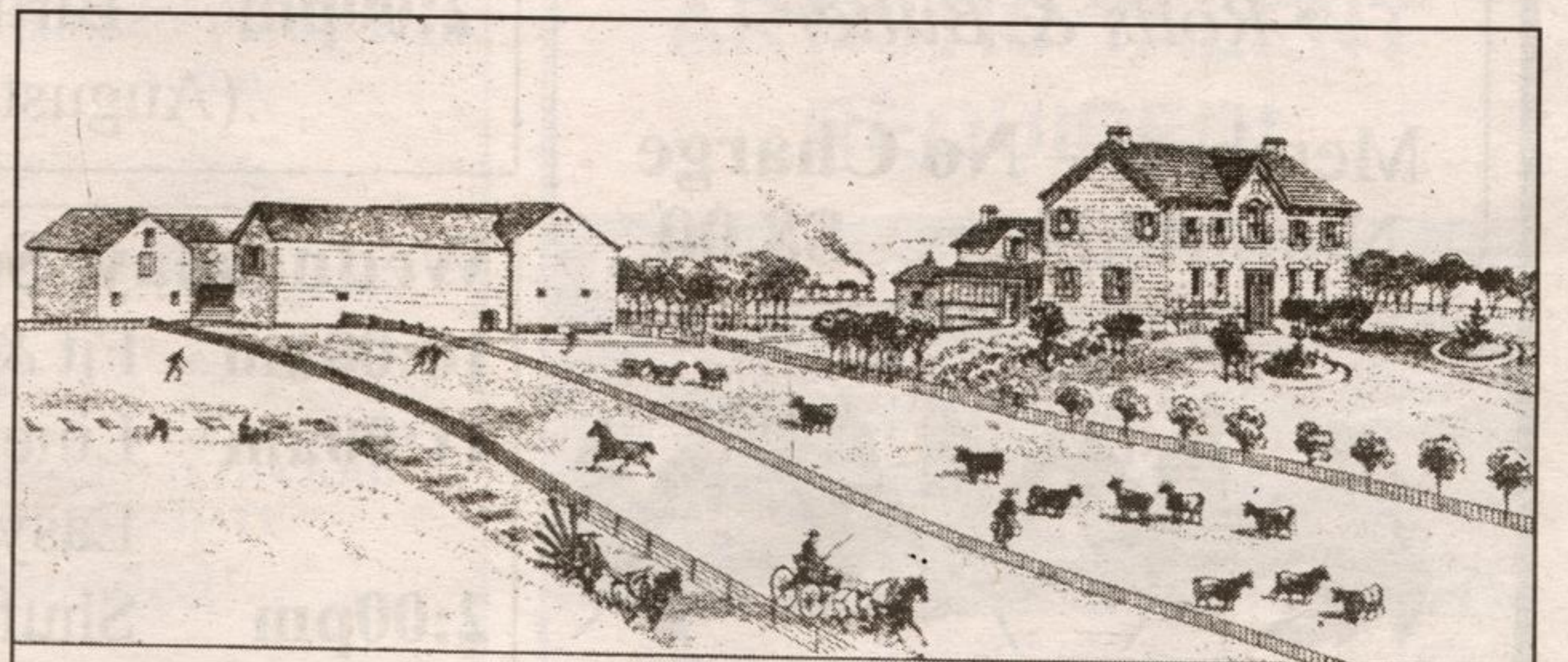
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HILL'S HOTEL, where the late great Indian runner, Tom Longboat, boarded while practicing for the Marathon is shown in this old photo reproduction. Longboat would run from Stewarttown to Hornby during his distance training.



RESIDENCE OF DUNCAN STEWART ESQ ESQUESING.

FROM THE HALTON ATLAS 1877