

Yonge St-Ontario's main street 1793-1850

Yonge Street was to be the model for a network of important military roads envisioned by Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe in 1793.

Named after his close friend, Sir George Yonge, British Secretary of War at the time, Simcoe's road was to play a central role in the history of Upper Canada.

One of his first projects, after establishing York as the provincial capital, Yonge Street was to be a military road leading north, opening a route to the Upper Lakes.

Simcoe personally led an expedition north along the Humber-Holland trail to explore the best route. And when the party returned - half starved - along the Don Trail, Simcoe was convinced they had found the best route between York and Lake

Simcoe. He then directed the provincial Surveyor General, Augustus Jones, to complete a survey of the route. This was carried out during the winter and into the spring of 1794; at the same time 200-acre lots were laid out on either side of the right-of-way.

By August of that year, Yonge Street had been opened (cut out of the bush) to lot 29, one quarter mile south of Thornhill with the help of settlers and the Queen's Rangers.

However, work had to be postponed when the threat of an American attack compelled Simcoe to divert his contingent of Rangers to the Niagara frontier.

Toward the end of 1795, Simcoe contracted with Jones to complete Yonge Street. And on January 4, 1796, Jones with the help of 30 Queen's Rangers em-

barked on a seven-week expedition to finish the task started two years earlier.

He returned to York on Feb. 20 to inform the Lieutenant Governor that Yonge Street was now opened from York to Pine Fort Landing, Lake Simcoe, 33 miles.

While opened in 1796, Yonge Street remained in appalling condition, studded with stumps, fallen trees, swamp and mud wallows.

In July of 1796 he and Mrs. Simcoe returned to England because of illness - never to return to see the fruits of his labour.

The promise of free land continued to lure settlers to Upper Canada, and many braved the hazards of Yonge Street to travel to their land.

However, one of the earliest settlers in Thornhill had to disassemble his wagon and drag it up Yonge

Street because the condition of the road was so deplorable.

In those early days, money was also in short supply. Luckily, the Northwest Company decided to abandon the Ottawa River route to the Upper Lakes and use the new Yonge Street route instead.

Between 1799 and 1812, the company contributed about £12,000 (\$60,000) to improve the road, enabling it to freight trade goods and canoes the 33 miles to Lake Simcoe one way and furs on the return trip.

The Stump Act of 1800 may have helped in a small way to improve Yonge Street, because it set convicted drunks to work with axe and logging chain removing stumps.

But even in 1801 a survey reported Yonge Street "still cluttered with unburned trees and brush, and for the greater part, impassable for carriages because of logs on the roadway."

And within the town limits, Yonge Street north from Lot Street (now Queen St.) was impassable and virtually abandoned. Southbound traffic had

to detour at Yorkville east to Toronto Street, then on to the town centre. Other horrors faced the intrepid wagon master, including the steep and precipitous Rosedale Ravine; the Summer Hill, just south of St. Clair Avenue; and the descent and ascent at Hogg's Hollow on either side of York Mills.

By the late 1820's Yonge Street had become a regular route for local stage coach operators with daily runs between York and Holland Landing (with more than five dozen taverns along the way). However, the roadway was still an unsurfaced wagon track.

Public outrage with the condition of Yonge Street continued for many years. And finally, it was established as a toll road in 1831. By 1833, the York town council authorized a contractor to lay the first test mile of macadamized roadway over the street.

At that point the outrage came from the council members when they found out how much it was going to cost. Final tab for the first mile was more than £3,000 (\$15,000). By the

late 1830s, 12 miles of Yonge Street had been macadamized, but it didn't remain in usable condition for very long.

After improving a particularly dangerous section of Yonge Street at Hogg's Hollow, the provincial government finally accepted responsibility for

upkeep of the entire route in 1846.

By 1850 Yonge Street was macadamized as far north as Holland Landing. One can only wonder what Sir George Yonge, an expert on ancient Roman roads, might have thought about the street named after him.

Ebenezer WI makes flowers

Did you know that the first Women's Institute in the world was organized at Stoney Creek, Ont. on Feb. 19, 1897?

On Sept. 14, 1984, our meeting was held in the home of Mrs. Glayds Marchant, the president, with 11 ladies

present. After the ode, collect, business, and roll call, we were introduced to ribbon flower making by Gwen Tuck. Everyone enjoyed this.

Then, we had an auction sale which gave us a lot of fun and laughter and yielded a

collection of articles to take home. A delightful lunch was served by our convenors, Mrs. Grant Fagan and Mrs. Evelyn Thomson. We all went home feeling that it was good to be in fellowship again.

In August we met at the Georgian Manor as planned and helped to entertain at a birthday party for 16 people, who all received a little gift. Isobel O'Brien convened the meeting and gave us all a warm welcome.

Sally Leitchenberg and Violet Howard provided the music for us to sing many old songs. The residents certainly enjoyed that. There were readings by Isobel O'Brien and Rosa McCausland.

An enjoyable lunch was served including a large birthday cake.

We were grateful for the opportunity to serve in this way.

Support for farm management course

A delegation from Simcoe County, made up of representatives of the Simcoe County Federation of Agriculture, Georgian College, and county council (headed by Warden Ross Whiteside), met with Dennis Timbrell, Minister of Agriculture and Food in Toronto recently. The purpose of the meeting was to ask for approval and support from the Ministry for a two year diploma course in farm business management which Georgian College proposes to offer at its Barrie and Owen Sound Campuses.

The course, which is presently in the hands of the College of Regents, and which will be presented to the Minister of Colleges and Universities for approval, could begin as early as January, 1985.

Those attending the meeting with the Minister in addition to Warden Whiteside were Gerard Moran, chairman of the general government committee of County council Reeve of Flos; Morris Darby, member of the agriculture planning and development committee and Reeve of Tiny; Joe Lindner, president Simcoe County Federation of Agriculture; Allan Johnson, first vice-president SCFA; Bruce Clark, second vice-president SCFA; Robert Cowan, secretary-manager SCFA; Gordon Coukell, secretary treasurer Simcoe

County Milk Committee; Ardiel Grieve, president Simcoe County Cattlemen's Association; Wayne Busch, president Georgian College of Applied Arts and Technology, and John Fennell, member board of governors, Georgian College.

While Timbrell was non-committal at the meeting, he indicated that he would answer in the near future.

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