

ABCD: Accidents, Blazes, Calamities, and Disasters from Historic Mississauga

Note by A. Choate Little

We welcomed the always very interesting Matthew Wilkinson as our speaker on July 2, 2019. Matthew is Historian for Heritage Mississauga and his presentation was titled: ABCD: Accidents, Blazes, Calamities, and Disasters from Historic Mississauga.

Of course, there are no barriers between Halton and Peel County and when disaster strikes, the resulting explosions and fires can be heard and seen for miles. Emergency and health professionals race to assist neighbours regardless of municipality. People in Halton saw, heard and helped in more than a few of the Accidents Matthew described. TTHS member Doug Kirkwood told us that in 1970, he was Divisional Superintendent with the Halton-Peel St. John's Ambulance Brigade when Air Canada flight 621 crashed in Brampton on July 5th. In his words, "There were no survivors, but our main duty was to provide a First Aid service for the responders. We administered anti-tetanus shots to everyone, including ourselves, that were on the site. Sunburn was one of the main problems as the recovery crews spent the days looking down searching through the wreckage. We tied triangular bandages around their heads to protect the back of their necks (they looked like the Foreign Legion). Of course we handled all the other minor injuries and treated for dehydration.

At the time of the Mississauga train derailment and evacuation in November of 1979, I was the Superintendent of the Halton-Peel Corps of the St. John Ambulance Brigade. We assisted in the evacuation of the Mississauga, Queensway and Oakville Hospitals. In addition we provided First Aid service at a number of the evacuation shelters."

Although Matthew told us of two earlier train crashes, the 1979 derailment with its cars filled with chemicals and in particular, a car of chlorine, was the most dangerous. As a result of one of the earlier main line CPR Port Credit crashes, Mississauga had an emergency plan in place, and this ensured the success of the largest peacetime evacuation in Canada (and in North America until Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans).

Heritage Mississauga is currently gathering the stories of area people who were involved with the 1979 train derailment in Mississauga as an exhibit to commemorate the 40th anniversary of this event on November 10th. To participate in this project, [click here](#).

Blazes captured the terrible devastation of fires. The old villages of Derry West and the main street of Erindale were demolished by fire, in 1867 and 1919 respectively. I was interested to learn that the old farmhouse which serves as the clubhouse for the Derrydale golf course is the only remnant of Derry West. Streetsville saw several devastating fires, and the T.W. Hand Fireworks had several devastating fires in 1942 and 1943 when they were making was munitions on their business property on Cawthra Road. There was a fire in 1978 at the Texaco Refinery in Port Credit (this Mississauga Road location is presently being developed for residences).

The Catastrophes Matthew noted were early epidemics of cholera, diphtheria and in 1918-19, Spanish flu. These diseases know no borders and we can trace them in Halton as well, by correlating gravestone death dates.

The earliest recorded Disaster Matthew told us about, is shown on the 1806 Wilmot Survey map. Fallen trees along the Credit River are drawn as having fallen in the same direction. This indicates the impact of a 1791 hurricane. In view of this information, we also should look at the Halton 1806 Wilmot Survey for similar information.