

# ALTONA:

## A neighborly place, but in airport plans

ALTONA — "We've progressed a lot of ways as far as things go, but the feeling is really lost." That was how a longtime resident of Altona summed up her feelings about the community to The Tribune last week.

The community of Altona comes under the plans for the Pickering airport and now, most lifetime residents have moved away, or have plans to move.

"The old neigh-

borhood as we knew it: that's old history now," remarked Fred Lewis, proprietor of Altona Feed and Supplies and a lifetime resident.

Most older residents have moved to other rural

areas around Ontario: Lindsay, Peterborough, Barrie, Orillia, Stratford, and elsewhere.

But, as Mrs. Bert Lewis puts it, "When you've been there that long, the roots get awful

deep. It's hard to pull out." Mrs. Lewis and her husband lived in the Altona area much of their lives and now reside on Watson Drive, Stouffville. In the old days, as Bert Lewis, 80, recalls it, "you went to Stouffville on a Saturday night, and you knew everybody. That was the main shopping night and the streets would be lined with horses."

Their son, Fred, described Altona as "just one of the little rural communities that contained a pond to swim in and a school yard to play ball in and a general store to buy a chocolate bar in."

Fred, a former councillor in Uxbridge Township, had proposed a plan a few years ago to move some of the historic buildings from Altona to a new site to be called "New Altona."

The plan also called for moderately-priced housing for people expropriated from the

airport lands. The scheme died, however, for lack of support from Township and Regional government. The proposed location was on "Century City" land.

By now, most families are already living in new homes far from Altona. Others, such as Desmond and Adelaide Kerr, have made plans for a new life. They are setting up a Christian camp called "Camp Agape," near Huntsville.

The Kerrs came to Altona from Toronto about 25 years ago, and soon learned to appreciate the community. Altona was special, "just in the way the community is expected to function," said Mrs. Kerr. "Like at a funeral — everything that has to be done is done by the neighbors that know you."

The Kerrs' older children attended the one-room school where there was "a real closeness amongst the kids, like a family... a real per-

sonalness about," Mrs. Kerr said.

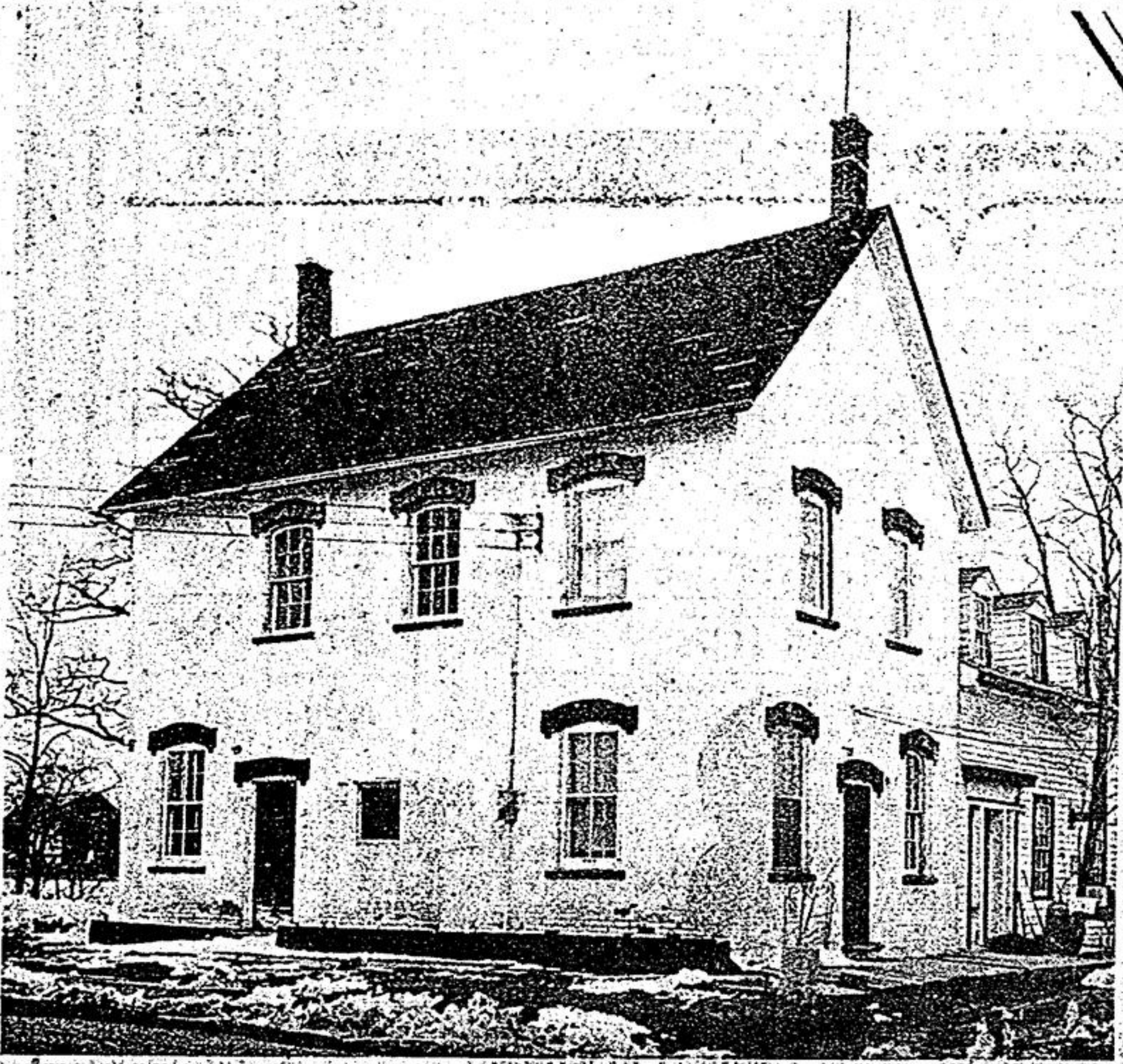
Some of the happy times that Mrs. Kerr remembers were quilting bees and sewing classes held in various homes in the winter. "They were really just an excuse for a get together and a gab," she said.

They also thought back to using battery-powered crank phones with 15 to 18 co-members on a party line and never having their sideroad ploughed in the wintertime.

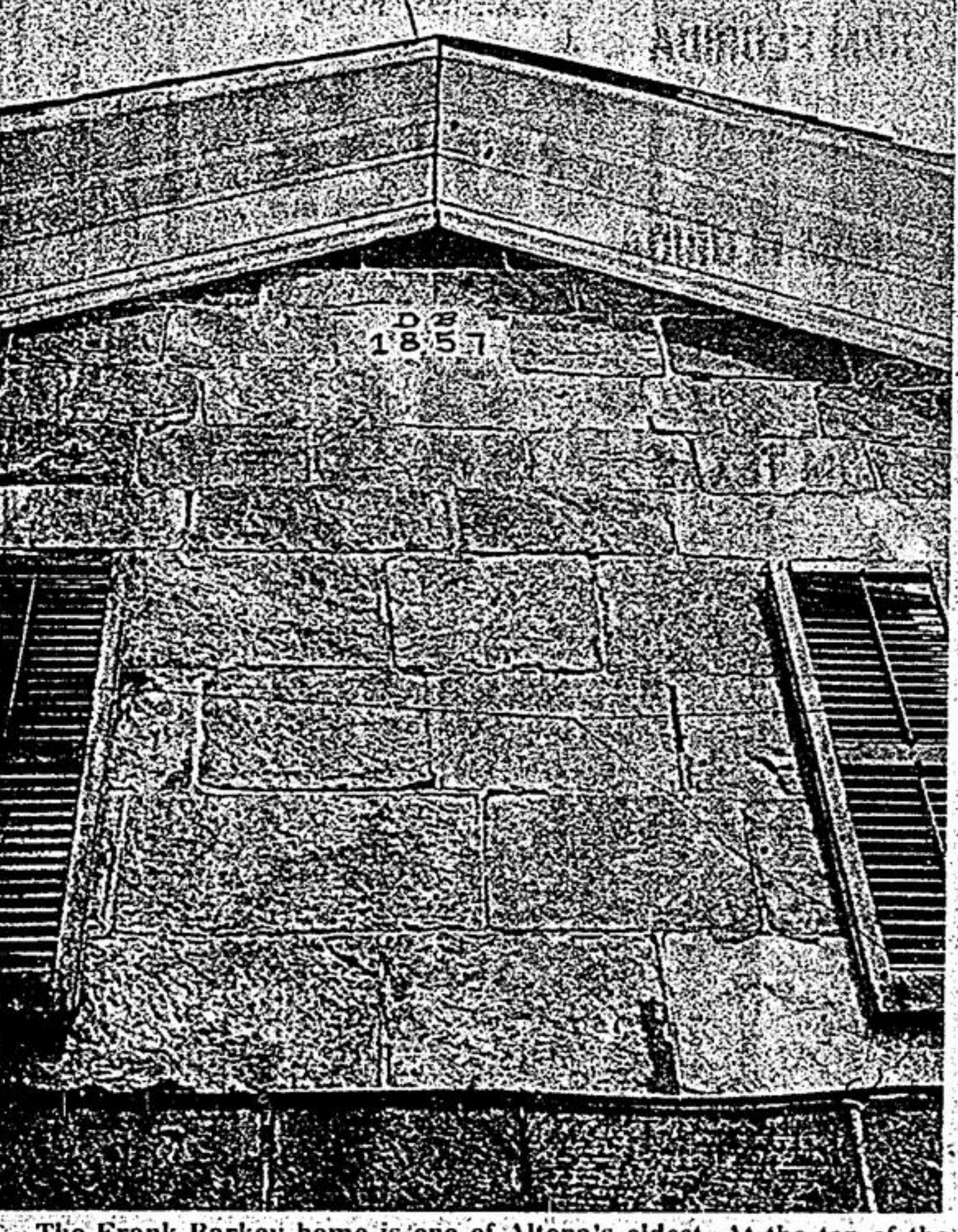
But the most memorable aspect of Altona were the neighbors. When Albert Foster, on the ninth line, had his barn burnt down, the neighbors rebuilt it. And when a visitor from the city got stuck in the snow, neighbor Stanley Reesor hooked up his team and pulled them out.

Although the buildings in Altona may remain for several years, those flesh and blood people who made the old community are now but a few.

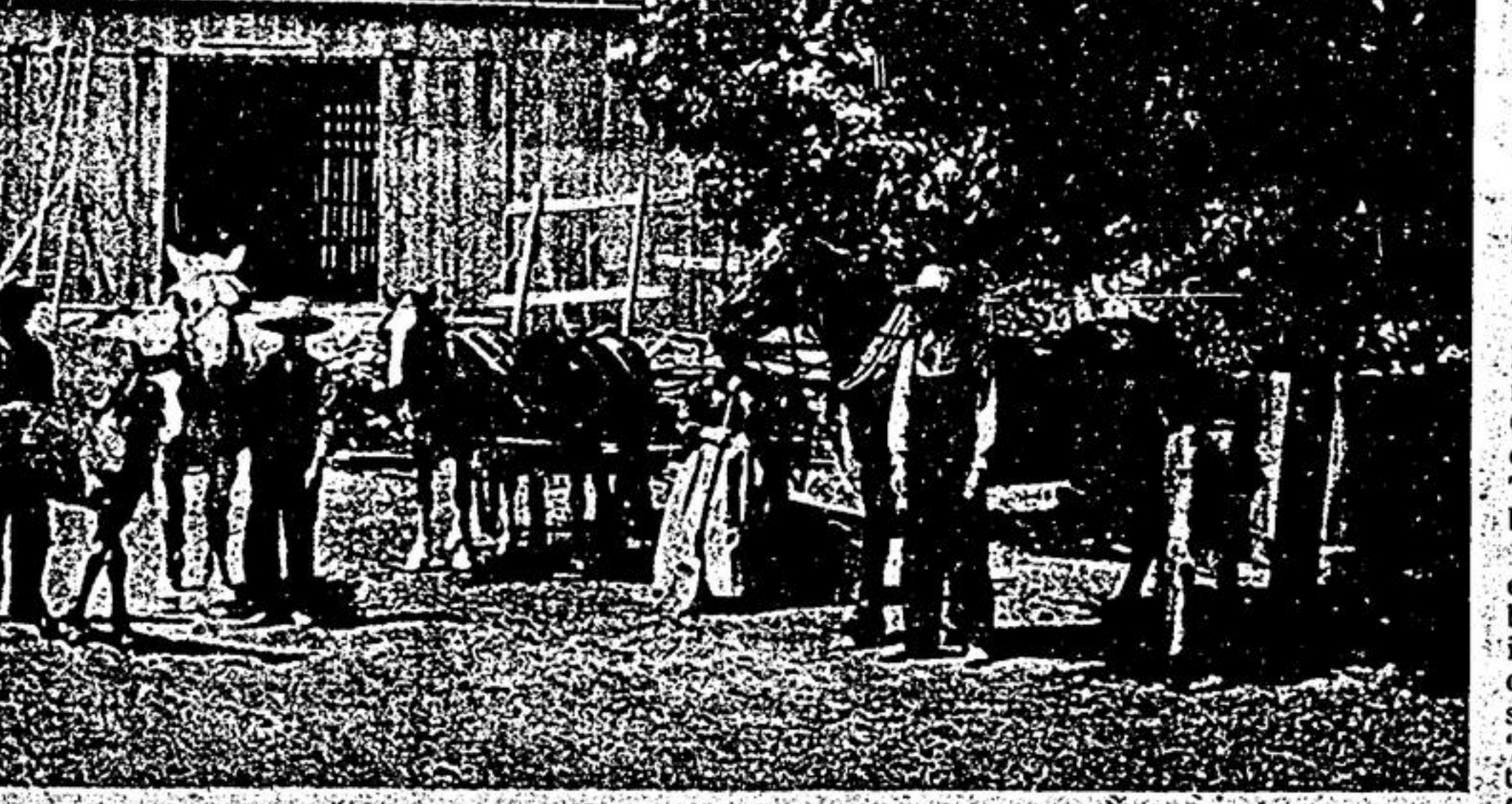
Even if the airport hadn't come in, Mr. Kerr said, "something was changing."



This building was first used as a hotel, then general store, and then apartments. It was known as the "Look-See Brown Hotel," and it is said that many hair-raising events took place there. Operating the building as a store, beginning in 1921, was Oliver Madill, who retired in 1955.



The Frank Barkey home is one of Altona's oldest. At the top of the picture, the inscription "D.B. — 1857" can be seen carved into a stone. The home was built by Daniel Barkey, ancestor of Frank, who settled at the farm in 1837.



The two oldest living residents of Altona, Bert and Stanley Lewis, are shown here on their parents' farm in 1897. From left to right are: their father, Thomas; Bert; their mother, Jane; and Stanley. Today, Bert lives on Watson Drive, Stouffville, while Stanley still resides in Altona.

Story and pictures by  
**Ted Wilcox**

### Old buildings remain

## Altona's pioneers hospitable group

ALTONA — Even with the threat of an airport nearby, Altona today has a peaceful appearance to it. Its remaining graceful old buildings and houses tell a story of simpler, less hectic times.

"People were more friendly. Folks dropped in to see you without a special invitation." That was the recollection of Mrs. Barkis Reesor of hospitality in her grandmother's day, as stated in a presentation to the Altona Women's Institute in 1926.

"Dancing, skating, Sunday School picnics, logging bees, sleighriding parties were all enjoyed," she wrote. "Father's word was law... All were concerned for soul saving and church attendance."

Altona was a predominately a Mennonite settlement from its early days. As the story is

told in "From Paths to Planes", a history of the Claremont area, "names such as Nighswander, Reesor, Barkey and Monkhouse were well known" and highly respected in this pioneer settlement."

Some of the landmarks include the old hotel, later used as a general store and today as apartments.

In 1850, a store, was begun by Joseph Monkhouse, which became well known for its abundant stock of groceries and dry goods as well as fancy china.

The cider mill, still in operation last fall, had originally been used for a woollen mill, saw mill and grist mill. Formerly, up to a ton of apple butter was being produced there, but the concentration of late has been on cider.

The farmers of Altona were involved mostly in mixed farming, and the farms were handed down generation to generation. One of the last remaining is the Barkey farm, operated by Frank Barkey, member of the sixth generation from Daniel Barkey who settled in Altona in 1824.

Another important landmark in the community is the Community Centre, converted from a one-room schoolhouse. The present building was built in 1911.

A recollection of the early schooling is given by Abijah Jones, who died in 1889. Within the walls of the "old brick schoolhouse," he wrote, "we often felt the sting of the schoolteacher's five-fingered strap or the birch rod. On one occasion, he sent one of the boys down to the head of the old mill pond to cut a

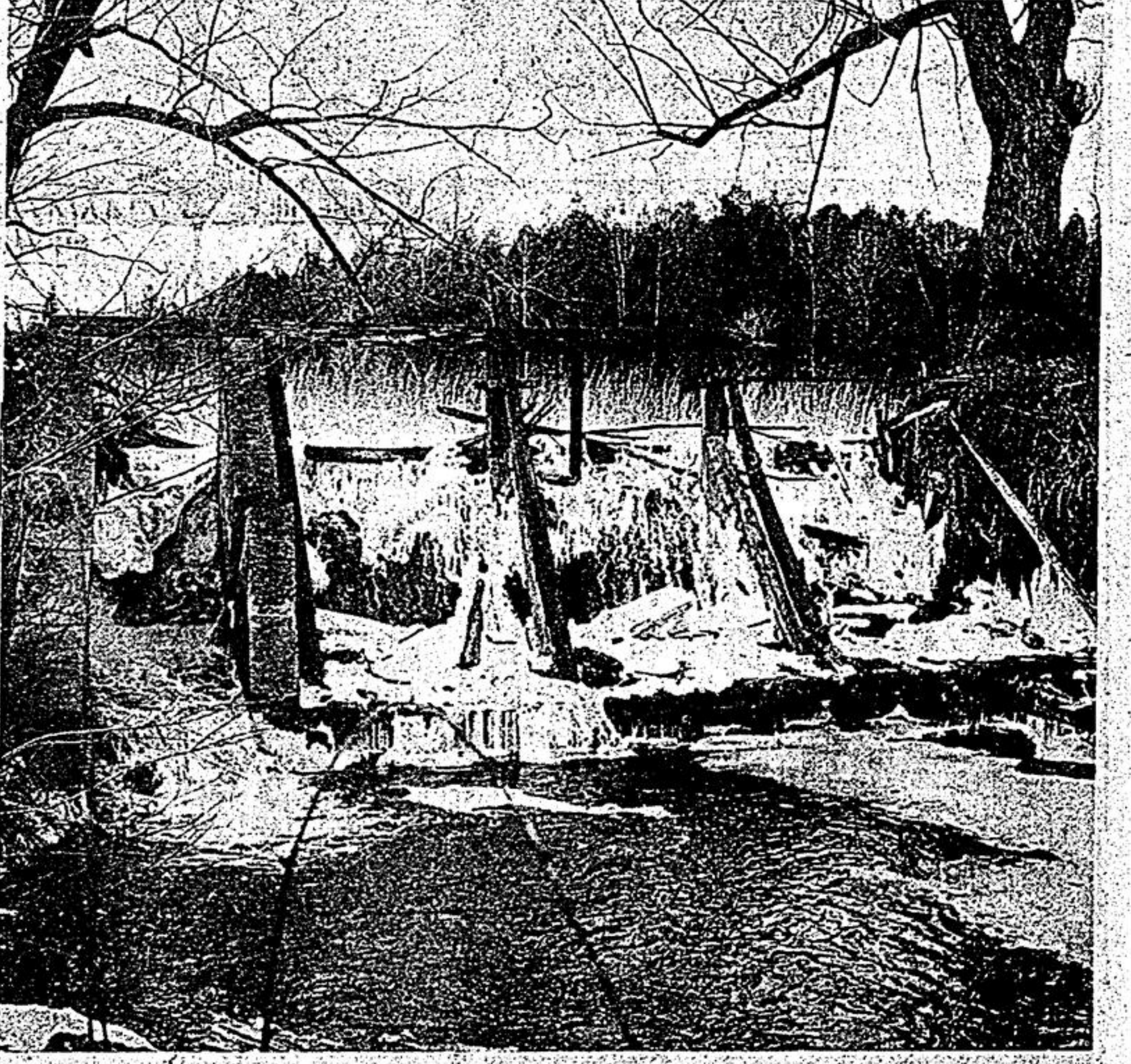
rod, as the old one was getting used up by continual use."

The oldest standing building in the community is the old Mennonite Church, built about 1853. The church there had connections with those Mennonites settling in Whitchurch and Markham Townships and services "have always been in circuit with others in the district," according to "From Paths to Planes."

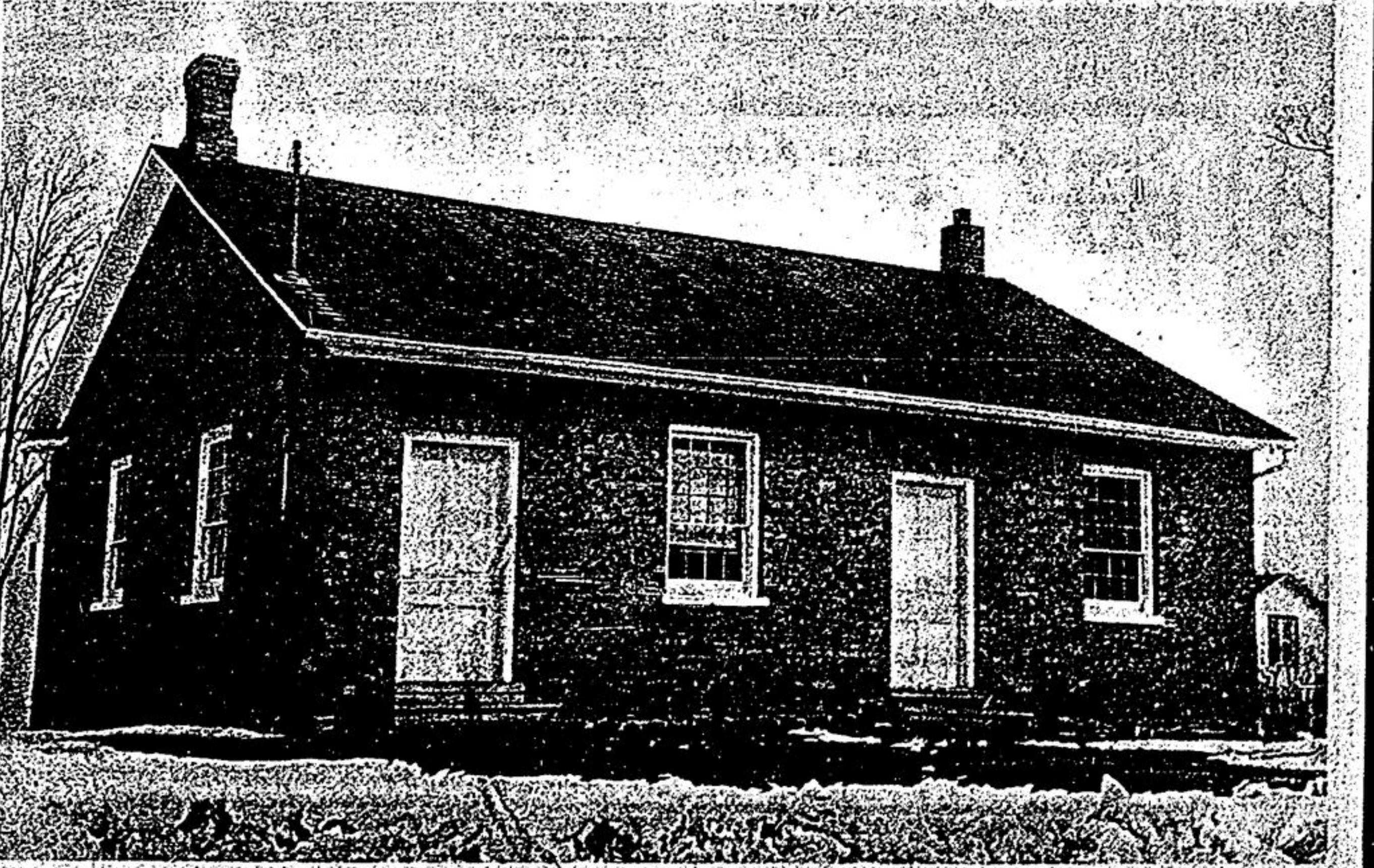
The Altona Missionary Church was erected in 1875, with several alterations made since then.



"Monkhouse" was a well-respected name in Altona among the early settlers there. In 1849, Joseph Monkhouse came to Canada and a year later set up a store in Altona that came to be known in the district for its fine tableware. The above gravestone is found in the cemetery beside the old Mennonite Church.



This old dam, now fallen into disrepair, formerly powered a mill owned by four generations of Nighswanders. The mill was first a woollen mill, then a saw mill, then a grist mill and finally a cider mill. Today, the mill is powered by a Studebaker car engine rather than water.



The Mennonite Church in Altona is the oldest building in the community, being erected in 1852. Prior to that, meetings were held in a log school on the north corner of the present community centre property.