

# Locust Hill a shadow of former self

By NANCY HOSKIN

Don't blink while driving through or you'll miss Locust Hill.

Once a prosperous trading center and transportation link near Markham's eastern boundary, it has all but vanished in the wake of government red tape and expropriation.

Locust Hill was officially established as a hamlet in 1885 and what's left of it is now celebrating its 100-year anniversary. It received its name for the cluster of locust trees planted on a hill overlooking the area on the William Armstrong farm.

The community grew up around the Ontario and Quebec Railroad which began operation in 1884. The railroad provided transportation for goods produced by factories in Whitevale and Green River.

It also gave the farmers easy access to transport their produce and supplies. A creamery was located on the south side of Hwy 7 and a grain elevator was also in operation.

Much of the land surrounding the hamlet is now owned by the government and families whose roots stem back to the beginning rent their property back for farming.

"When expropriating land for the proposed airport in the '70's, the government decided to abandon the idea of including the actual hamlet for historical reasons," said Ann Armstrong.

Mrs. Armstrong has spent several years

researching the backgrounds and archives of local churches. She explained that you have to know the history of the area before you can fully understand the research as a whole.

When driving through Locust Hill one wonders where the actual centre used to be. There are few original buildings remaining. One surviving structure is the large, blue building housing an antique store and cabinet maker on the south side. This was first built as a temperance hotel and general store.

"There were several drinking houses beyond Locust Hill, and as religion played an important part of life in this era, the Nighswander brothers, an old Markham family, decided to start a house for the non drinkers," explained Mrs. Armstrong.

At different times the building was occupied by the post office, a bank, during the First World War, and an ice cream parlor. When rural one-room school houses became obsolete over 20 years ago many were torn down or converted for other purposes, for example, the Box Grove Community Center. Locust Hill's school, built in 1864 and located on the 10th Line is now a home.

The founding families in the hamlet were predominantly Methodist, first forming a small congregation which met at different homes. The first church built in 1856 was located next to the cemetery. The present

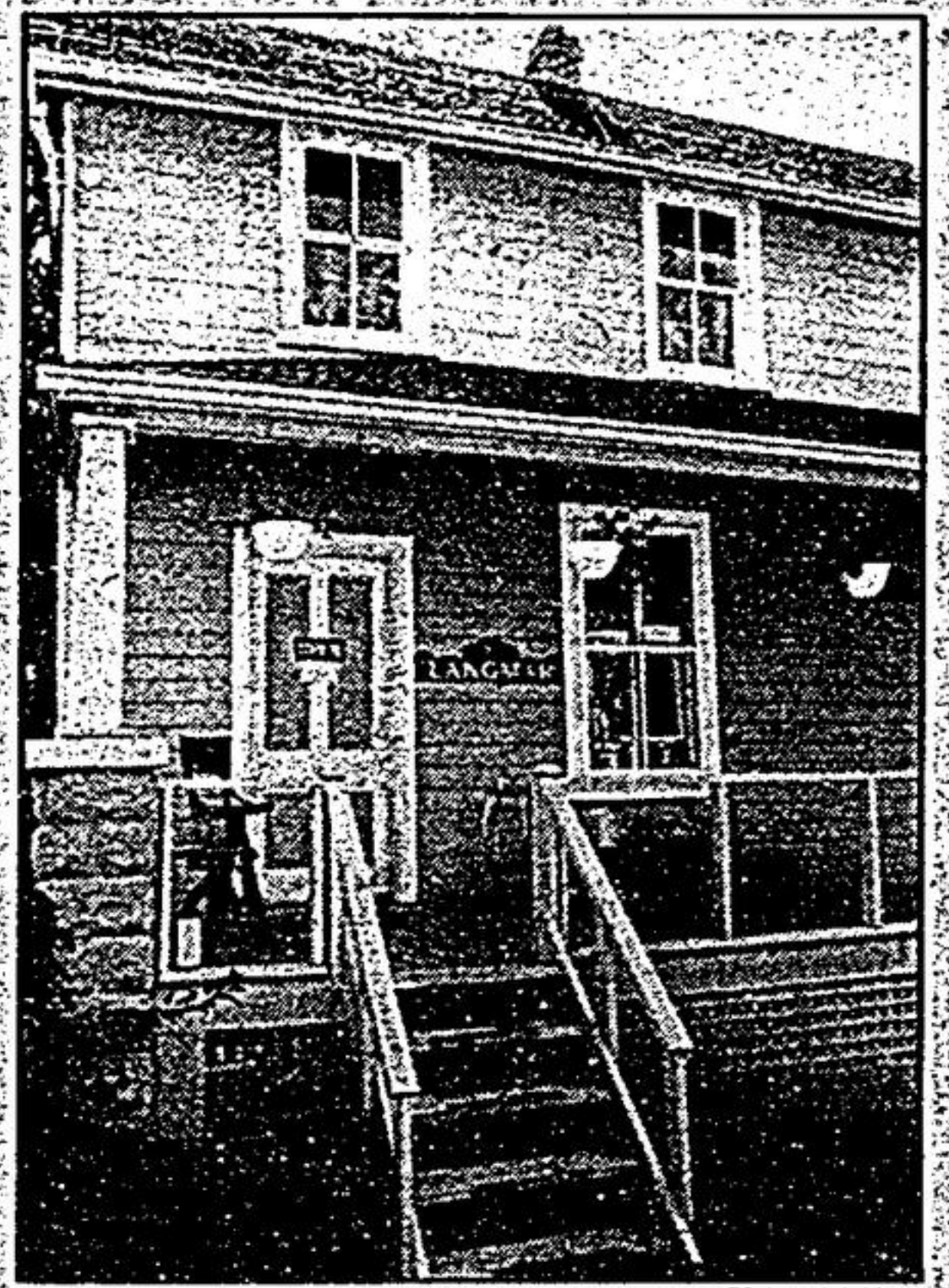
church structure, now a United Church, on the north side of Hwy. 7, was erected in 1891.

According to the book 'Historical Complexities of Pickering, Markham, Scarborough and Thornhill', under the church cornerstone copies of 1890s issues of 'The Globe', 'Mail', 'Empire', 'Economist', 'Sun' and 'Pickering News' were deposited by trustees who felt they would better serve the community in circulation. No coins or bills were accepted.

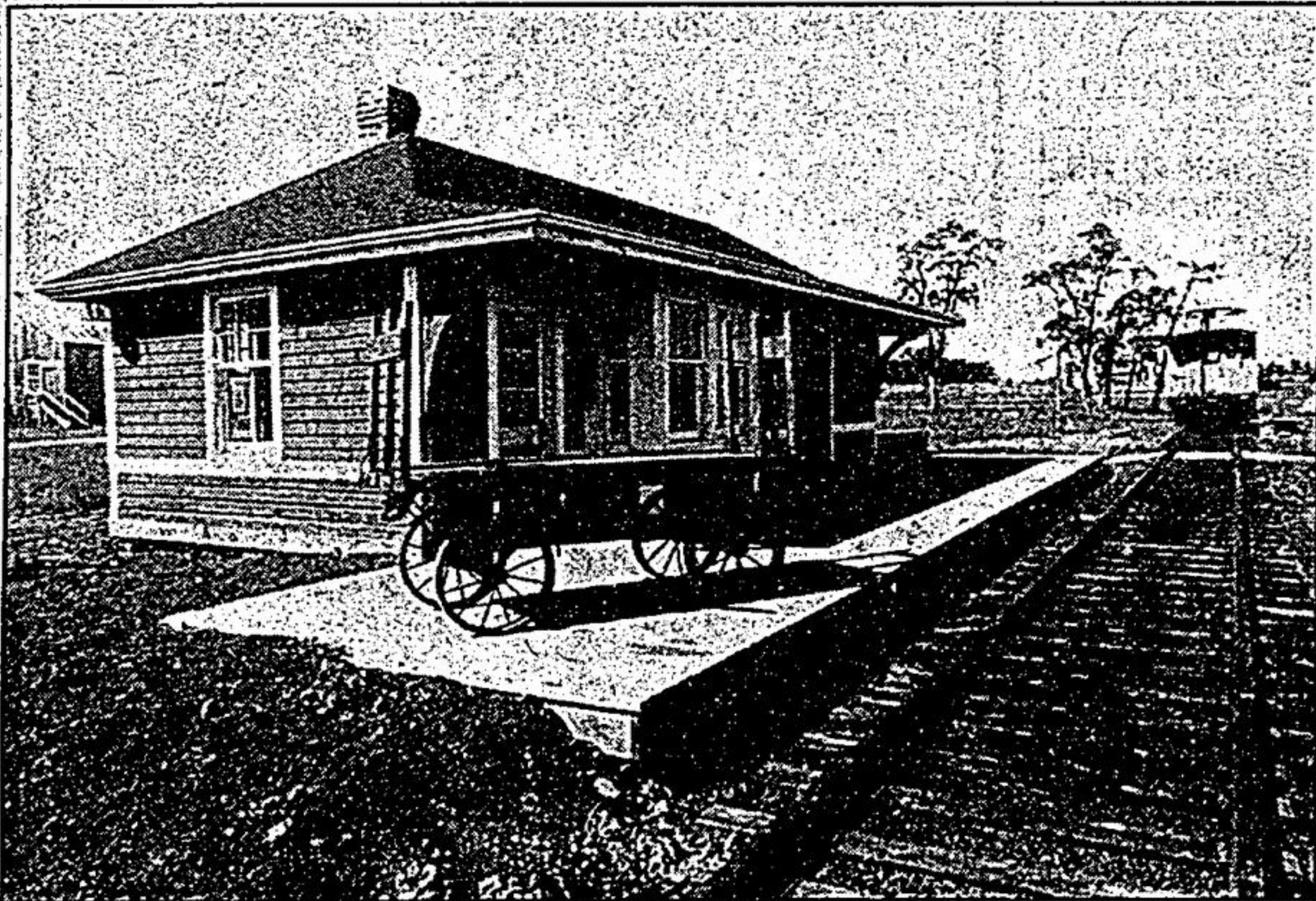
As the trains were very important and Locust Hill became a major transportation link for south and central Markham and the central western portion of Pickering, a water tower was erected. The pumping house located on the Little Rouge River supplied the water for the steam trains. The speed and surety of the railroad over horsedrawn vehicles opened up to rural residents a new world beyond their immediate vicinity.

Many of the original founding families names, including Reesors, Buttons and Reynolds, have long moved from the area. New, young families move in, many to get away from the hectic lifestyle brought about by city living.

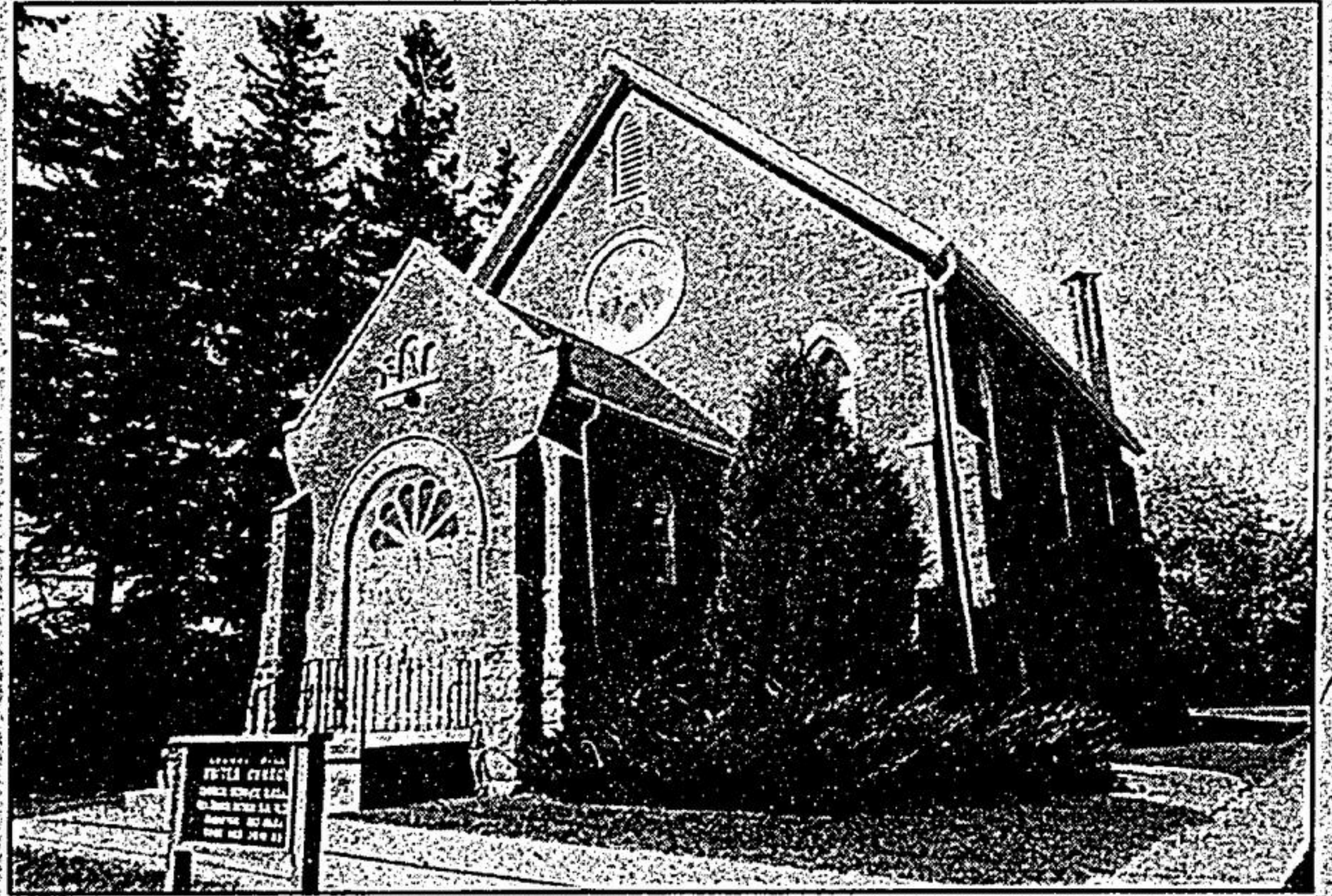
The small community is still quiet, and though there isn't even a general store or a train station still in existence, (the old station is on display in the Markham District Museum), it offers a calm surrounding and beautiful country backdrop.



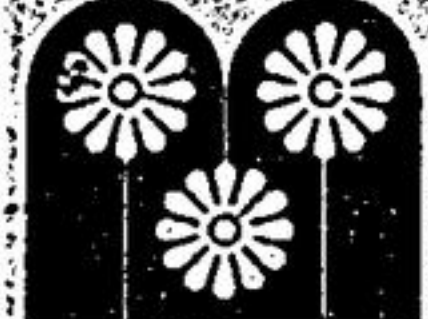
Once a temperance hotel, this building now houses an antique store and cabinet maker shop. It remains one of the few original buildings left in Locust Hill.



The original Locust Hill railway station burned down many years ago and was replaced by this wooden structure which is now on display at the Markham Museum.



Built in 1891, this church was originally a Methodist place of worship. In 1925 when the Methodist and Prysbyterian churches combined, it became Locust Hill United Church.




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## Pickering pursuing Toyota

A portion of the Ontario government's north Pickering land holdings could be given to Toyota Canada to entice the automobile-maker to move there, according to mayor Jack Anderson.

Mayor Anderson said housing minister Alvin Curling has responded favorably to a suggestion that the province give Toyota 600 to 800 acres of Ontario Land Corporation (OLC) property.

The proposal, for a parcel located at Brock Road and Conc. 4, would be the responsibility of industry and trade minister Hugh O'Neill.

Industry ministry officials have asked mayor Anderson to prepare a package detailing the available land and its zoning status.

Pickering Council has officially endorsed the provincial plan in a motion which was forwarded to Mr. Curling.

The housing minister's return letter assured mayor Anderson that the OLC would co-operate with the Town and Durham Region in supplying land to an industry such as Toyota.

But it's largely up to the car manufacturer to take that initiative, said OLC official Bill Wilson, who added: "We'll co-operate if Toyota, in its analysis, decides Durham is the place to go."

The Pickering mayor said a meeting will be arranged with Premier David Peterson's advisers to discuss strategies of approaching the company.