

Markham Village Preservation Society

'A rich heritage could enliven local business'

By David Byrnes

There may not be much in the way of sleigh-bells ringing down Main St. this Christmas, or hard working horses steaming up the winter air, but in the shapes of many old homes and buildings, images of Markham's rich rural past are still a reality.

The Markham Village Preservation Society wants to keep it that way.

The group has been organized over the past year by concerned residents who fear that Markham's historical buildings, and the small-town way of life they represent, are in danger of being swallowed up by today's raging development.

"We're not against the development," stresses MVPS President Linda Patterson, "but, we're very interested in preserving the old Village of Markham."

The present executive of the MVPS formed unofficially last year to protest a plan by Fineway Properties Inc. which would convert Jerman House (now Fred Cook Real Estate) into a dry-cleaning processing plant and depot — a plan which would involve radically changing the structure of the building. "From a preservation point of view this is the last house on Hwy 7 within the boundaries of Old Markham that has historical significance," Mrs. Patterson pointed out.

Last April the group was again stirred into action, lobbying against a plan that would see the Tremont Hotel on Main St. de-

molished. A meeting was held to organize formally in May, and since then the MVPS has been incorporated into the Ontario Historical Society.



Joanna French

Although Heritage Markham, an advisory body to Markham Council on heritage buildings, has similar concerns, its work to protect heritage buildings is admittedly "spread pretty thin" over the entire Markham Township, says Heritage Co-ordinator Aleta Burgess, who welcomes the MVPS as "really helpful".

"In Thornhill," she noted, "our work was made a lot easier by this group". The Society for the Preservation of Old Thornhill recently won its battle to have Old Thornhill designated a Heritage Conservation Study Area, thereby gaining a better legal protection for the area's historical buildings. "Designation" for Old Markham

is now a primary objective of the MVPS.

In the cases of Jerman House and the Tremont Hotel preservation aims and business initiatives have clashed, but Joanna French, First Vice-President of the MVPS, insists that this does not mean the group is "anti-business".

"We're not anti-business," says Mrs. French. "We're saying that heritage preservation is good business". Towns like Alora, Fergus and Unionville, that now have strong business communities, are examples of a successful "trend" in heritage preservation, she explains.

Mrs. French also points out that the value of heritage preservation is not just monetary. "We Canadians are always complaining that we don't have a history," she says. "Well, we're not doing much to preserve what we do have. In Europe they've been preserving their heritage for a long time. And Markham's history isn't even something that's gone, it's still here, it's still living".

The MVPS is presently working alongside Markham's Business Improvement Area by sponsoring a Christmas lighting contest called "Holiday Magic in Markham" — part of this year's Festival of Lights. The contest, to be judged December 14, will award trophies for the best decorated houses in Wards 4 and 5, best business and heritage building, best decorated street, and a Mayor's Trophy to be presented for the best decoration over-all.



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If the woman involved is the owner, she'll appreciate having the agent concentrate prospect's visits within the hours she is ready to receive them. Not when the children have just come home to lunch or the baby is ready for feeding.

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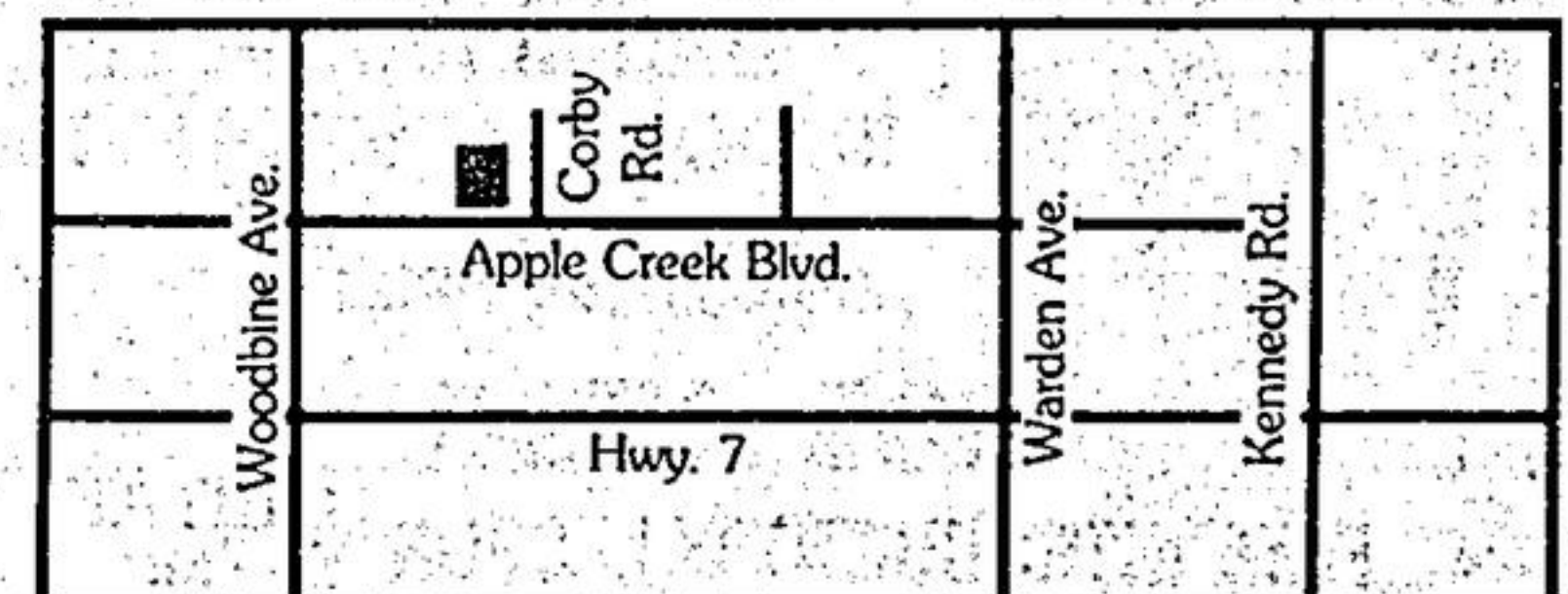
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