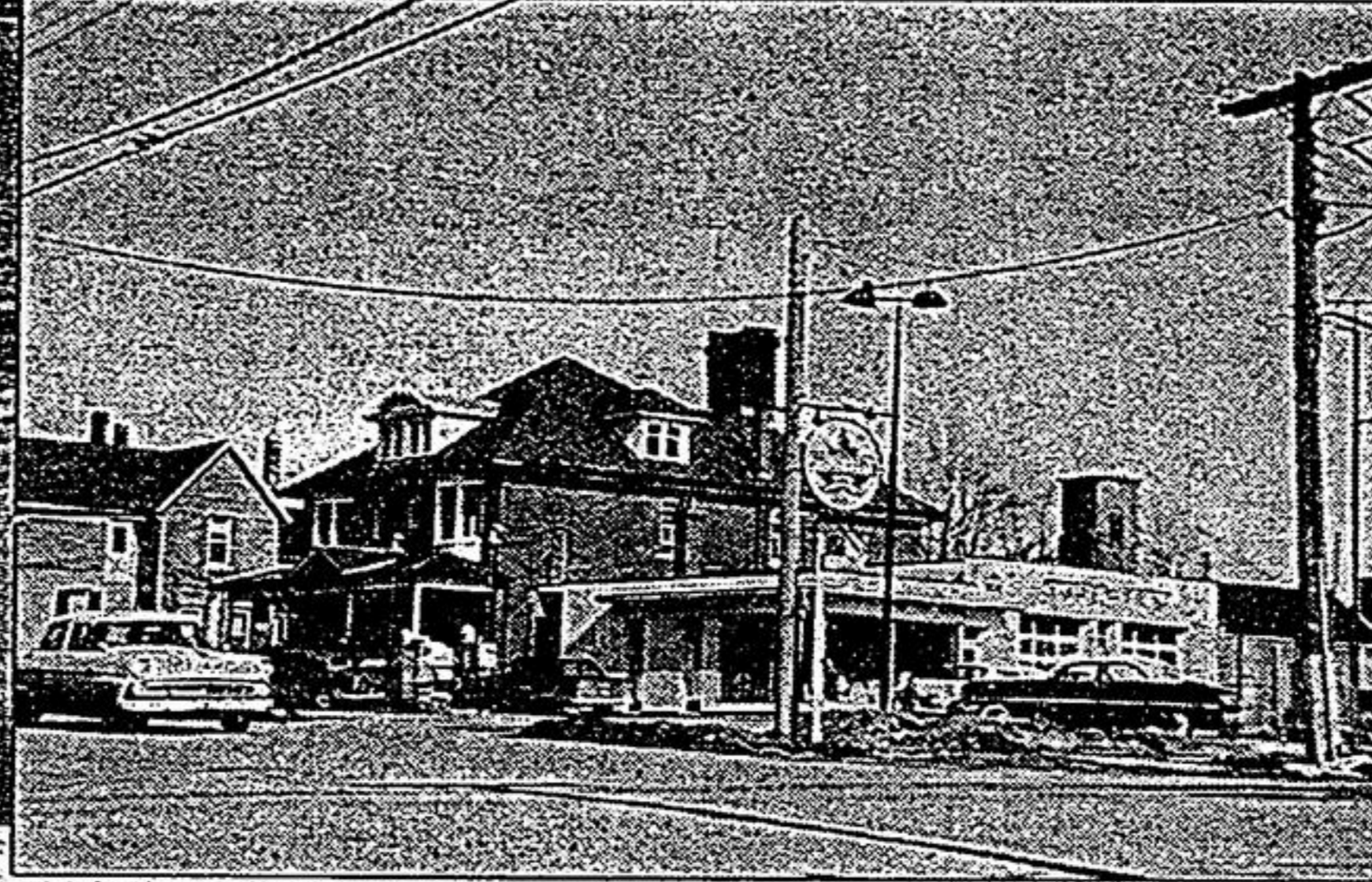


The northeast corner of Hwy. 7 and Main Street Markham as it looks today and as it did 50 years ago.



Key intersections harbingers of change

BY CHRIS TRABER
Staff Writer

Crossroads is an apt term for York Region's intersections; they tend to make a lot of people cross. And sad.

Whether it's ire resulting from the increased traffic or melancholy for places and spaces long gone, longtime residents all have somber recollections of what was.

Lorne Smith, 69, was born, raised and continues to live in the rural environs north of Markham. As the town's official historian, his interest in growth is both personal and scholarly.

Using a map he co-produced, he illustrates how concession roads running north and south first carved by new arrivals remain the main transport arteries today. All major roadways were exactly a mile and quarter apart in both directions to border 1,000-acre land parcels.

In the early 1800s five families worked the parcels. In the 1900s, 10 families farmed 100 acres each. Today, the same acreage supports between 2,000 and 5,000 homes.

Urban sprawl makes intersections once familiar and convenient virtually ghost roads, Mr. Smith said, adding he attended school at Colty's Corners, now Kennedy Road and Major Mackenzie Drive.

"There were stores and merchants there, people gathered, shopped and talked," he said. "With more people, the shopping areas moved to Markham and Unionville beginning in the 1950s



TODAY: Planning for growth

March 23: Economics of growth

March 30: Growing green

April 6: Getting around

April 13: Livable lifestyles

April 20: Healthy communities

Stores closed: Only the school is still there."

The commercial shift to Hwy. 7 and intersections at McCowan Road and Hwy. 48 spelled the end for most country corner stores and gathering places.

"It saddens me," Mr. Smith said. "There was a tremendous sense of community around these intersections. It's almost impossible to know your neighbours nowadays."

Craig Benson and wife, Iris, have raised four children in Markham since arriving in 1987.

An expanse of unspoiled countryside started at 16th Line and Kennedy and there was a farm at the southwest corner of Kennedy and Carleton, Mr. Benson recalled.

"Those intersections were like an oasis in what was a small town beginning to grow," he said. "We'd walk and bike in and around there. Now it's a plaza and homes. Development in Markham doesn't anger me. It does bother me."

Longtime Unionville resident Rafik Bechbache has observed the changes from his medical practice at Main Street south and Unionville Gate.

"It's getting busier," he said of the traffic. "The morning line-up is just packed on Main coming from (Hwy.) 7: McCowan, Kennedy and Warden is bumper to bumper. Brutal."

The changes around the intersection just north of at Hwy. 7 are indicative of how growth has gentrified what was a rural setting.

Gone is the corner gas station. The bank is closed. Nearby Unionville Fairways, an 18-hole golf facility where Dr. Bechbache's children learned to play, is gone.

"I've been here since 1985," the physician said. "We've lost the old, small town feel."

Markham Museum curatorial services supervisor Marie Jones resides in nearby Heritage Estates, a collection of rejuvenated century homes.

"Everywhere you look, four corners always had a connection with the villages and hamlets around them," she said. "They've almost all disappeared. The speed of today's traffic is too fast and these intersections are no longer a place to stop and do business. Growth has benefits but it's also affecting our cultural landscape."

The intersection of Hwy. 7 and Markham Road, once a peaceful corner bordering the former fairgrounds and a church, was a jog in the road during the 1950s, Ms. Jones said. Hwy. 7 was straightened

to accommodate traffic flow and is now mostly populated by vehicles and few pedestrians.

Thornhill wireless media executive producer Renata Richardson and her family have been residents for 22 years. Bayview Avenue and John Street is a key crossroad for shopping, recreation and travel.

'Everywhere you look, four corners always had a connection with the villages and hamlets around them. They've almost all disappeared.'

Marie Jones
Markham Museum curator

"When we first moved here it was a relatively quiet intersection," she said. "It was quaint and we'd often walk there. Now, it's a busy hub and not conducive for a stroll."

Richmond Hill resident Cora Donnelly recounts weekend jaunts to Maple where Rutherford Road and Keele Street meet. The corner and its amenities appealed to her European culture.

"It was an eclectic mix of small town Ontario and Old World shops," she said. "It was leisurely and peaceful. You could park, walk in any direction and enjoy the shops and sights. Today it's built up and hectic and the concentration of cafes and stores are gone."

VISION 2026

In 2026, York Region residents will live, work, play and learn in healthy, accessible and safe neighbourhoods that are vibrant, exciting and people-friendly, the vision statement says.

Residents will continue to enjoy the high quality of life that attracted them to York and will have a strong sense of belonging and commitment to their communities, the regional government predicts.

Eight goals are also listed to accomplish the vision:

► **IDENTIFY YOURSELF:** Fostering a strong sense of community, identity and place;

► **THINGS TO DO:** Encouraging and development of a range of activities, recreational opportunities and exciting community places;

► **SAFETY FIRST:** Promoting livable, sustainable and safe communities;

► **BUILD CORE VALUES:** Revitalizing and promoting compact community cores;

► **LOOKING GOOD:** Promoting high-quality urban design;

► **PARK YOUR CAR:** Encouraging pedestrian-friendly and transit-oriented neighbourhoods;

► **ENJOY IT ALL:** Valuing our countryside and rural lifestyle, as well as the distinctiveness of our towns and villages and;

► **CITY LIVING IN COUNTRY:** Addressing the challenge of demands for urban service levels in rural communities.

HAVE YOUR SAY

Sessions have been scheduled to allow you to get involved in the region's planning process. Open houses start at 5 p.m. followed by presentations at 7 p.m.

► **MARCH 21:** Regional South Services Centre, 50 High Tech Rd., Richmond Hill;

► **MARCH 23:** Town of Markham Anthony Roman Centre, Canada Room, 101 Town Centre Blvd., Markham;

► **APRIL 4:** Vaughan Civic Centre, council chambers, 2141 Major Mackenzie Dr., Vaughan;

► **APRIL 6:** Georgina Civic Centre, council chambers, 26557 Civic Centre Rd., RR 2 Keswick and;

► **APRIL 12:** Regional Administration Centre, seminar room, 17250 Yonge St., Newmarket.

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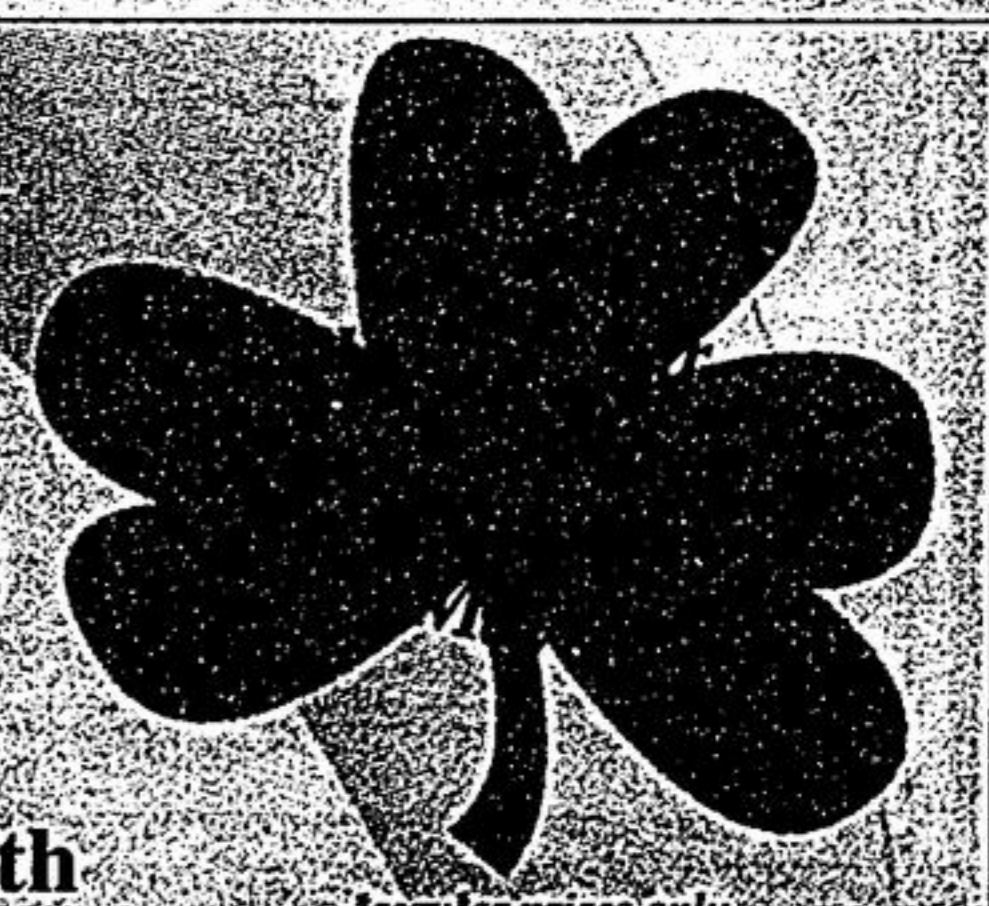
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