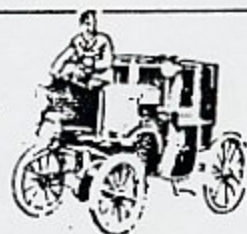


Our Hamlets then and now

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Lively Claremont had other name

by KAREN BROOKS

The advent of the railroad in 1884 in Claremont created a bustling community, but lately, the hamlet appears nothing like it once was, with fewer businesses and a larger population.

Lillian Gauslin, author of the history of Claremont called "From Paths to Planes", says most of the Claremont pioneers arrived in the 1830s and 1840s while the first settlers were Joseph and Joshua Wixson, who arrived near the end of the 18th century.

Joseph Wixson was said to have owned all the land on the west of Brock Rd. to his home on Concession Eight while his brother Joshua was the first elder of the first Baptist Church of Christ in Pickering. A church was built on Joseph's property in 1851, unfortunately after Joshua had died.

In the late 1830s, settlers from England began to swarm to the north Pickering area, including the Tracys, Gosticks, Palmers, Bennetts, Winters, Gerows, Millers, Underhills, Reesors, Waddells, Pughs, Evans, Wards, Pilkeys, Rawsons, Laws, Spopparts, Hutchisons and Morgans.

"Pickering is still one of the best farming regions in Ontario," says Mrs. Gauslin, explaining the reason for settlement in the north area.

In the 1830s, the only main "roads" in northern Pickering township were Brock and Kingston rds. Brock Rd., intersecting with Concession Nine to create the four corners of the hamlet, was only a path through the forest made by Indians, wild animals or settlers.

It wasn't until the 1860s that Brock Rd. was built using a grant of \$5,000 from County Council. In 1962, Brock Rd. was widened and hard-topped and signal lights finally installed at the four corners and in 1973, a two-lane bypass built east of Claremont, diverting traffic from the well-travelled hamlet.

Claremont was not always known as Claremont but rather as Noble's Corners after Thomas Noble, the first man to do business right in the hamlet.

"He was so well-liked and did such a flourishing business, (the settlers) decided to name the hamlet Noble's Corners," wrote Mrs. Gauslin about the owner of the first general store, having rented a stone building on the southwest corner.

By 1846, the hamlet was already the centre of many thriving businesses, supporting two blacksmith shops, two shoemaker shops, two carpenters, a harness maker, a cooper and many other necessary businesses, including John Michell's general store on the southeast corner. This two-storey brick

building, built in 1851, still stands to this day.

Education came to the hamlet in the 1840s in the form of an old log building on the northeast corner of Brock Rd. and Concession Nine. Eventually a better building was constructed just west of the present school. It was condemned in 1925. The Claremont Public and Continuation School as we know it now was built in 1925 and was known as one of the most modern in Ontario at the time.

The school survived the change to the central school system and an addition was constructed in 1972.

In 1850, the hamlet was ready for its own post office. William Michell suggested Claremont for the official hamlet name, after an uncle who had named his farm "Claremont cottage" after a town located near London, England.

With that, the hamlet became Claremont with the post office ready for service in 1851 and Thomas Noble as the first postmaster.

Many churches were built in and around the hamlet. The Claremont United Church was originally the Wesleyan Methodist Church. A newer building replaced the original (built in 1853) in 1889.

The Presbyterian Church, built in 1876, has been the Claremont Community Hall since 1925 when the church disbanded with the union of Methodism and that faith.

The Claremont Baptist Church was built new in 1866. The Baptist Male Quartet, formed between 1908 and 1909, became quite famous, signing on radio in 1935 before disbanding in the late 1940s.

"The Little church" opened in 1955 in an old bake store, eventually moving to the Stouffville Masonic Hall and then the old Ringwood School and becoming the Bethel Assembly of God.

"In 1835, long before the Union Cemetery was formed, a child was looking out of the window of their little log house one day when a bear came and stood in front of it," wrote Mrs. Gauslin. "She became so frightened that she died instantly and was buried in that same field."

Many of the early settlers are buried either at the Baptist Church cemetery or an uncared for cemetery on the Uxbridge-Pickering

Townline near Brock Rd.

Mrs. Gauslin says a newer cemetery was created in 1909 called the Claremont Union Cemetery, located on Concession Nine.

In 1884, the Canadian Pacific Railway opened the Claremont station, "a big factor in the growth of the community", says Mrs. Gauslin, with the line connecting Toronto to Perth.

She says during construction, in 1882, a huge landslide occurred near Claremont, killing Ira Woodruff and nearly killing a multitude of other workers.

She says for more than 25 years, an old covered bus carried passengers to and from the station for only 25 cents and took overnight visitors to the Claremont Hotel.

The station was closed in the 1960s and torn down about five years ago. Now, residents wait in a VIA Rail shelter for the commuter train to Toronto.

The railway station immediately brought a hive of new businesses to the hamlet.

Already by the 1860s, mills of every kind dotted the Claremont area - saw mills, the Russell Oatmeal mill, grist and flour mills, woolen mills, cider mills, carding mills and feed mills.

One very well known mill was Peter Nighswander's cider mill where cider, vinegar and Dutch applesauce (apple-butter) were made - the mill itself a landmark in the community for more than 135 years.

Mrs. Gauslin says even tinier communities than the hamlet sprouted up around these mills, for instance, Slab Town or Evansville.

More recently, in 1948, a feed mill and store in north Claremont became the Claremont Co-operative, still a highly successful business.

Claremont by the early 1900s had every convenience of a bustling, thriving community in Ontario.

Barbershops, bakeshops, butcher shops, clockmakers, creameries, dressmakers, factories, a funeral home, furniture shops, implement shops, a livery, a millinery, painters and decorators, plumbers, doctors, dentists, veterinarians, hardware stores, wagon-makers, welders, opticians and woodworkers dotted the expanding hamlet.



Local History File

Claremont
(Ont.)

For Reference



CLAREMONT in 1910 had so many businesses that the hamlet organized the Claremont Businessmen's Association.

Claremont even had its own businessmen's association.

The hotel is one of the many points of interest in the hamlet. The Claremont Hotel was built in the 1840s on the northeast corner out of logs. Burned down in 1937, a more modern structure was built but it too was destroyed by fire in 1970.

Claremont has boasted its own bank for many years. The first, the Farmer's Bank, located where the Co-operative is at present, closed its doors in 1911. But another bank, the Sovereign Bank, was built on the northeast corner of Joseph and Brock sts., operating from 1903 to 1908.

In 1908, this bank became the Standard Bank of Canada, in 1928, the Canadian Imperial Bank and finally in 1961, the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce.

In 1907, Claremont had a population of about

300 and in 1908, the townspeople separated the hamlet from Pickering Township (now Town) to become a police village. It wasn't until 1968 that the hamlet joined back with the Town of Pickering over much opposition from the 600 inhabitants.

Mrs. Gauslin says there was always much to do in the active hamlet.

In 1875, the first Claremont Band was organized and through the years, the band had travelled to many community fairs. Many groups have continued to thrive in Claremont including seniors clubs, Guiding, Boy Scouts, women's institutes, the Lions Club, the North Pickering Royal Canadian Legion and the Brougham Union Masons whose lodge has been in the area since 1910.

Recreation was always important in the rural hamlets. Mrs.

Gauslin says in the early days, Claremont had tennis courts, a curling rink, an outdoor skating rink, a drama club, dances in the hall and a bowling alley just north of the bank.

And, to this day, baseball has been a strong sport in the hamlet, and like most activities, has taken place

in the Memorial Park which originally opened in 1923.

The winter carnival was held for years and years at Christmas-time and was resurrected recently to be held in February.

Many other fairs, such as the spring show

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Claremont changed from days as Noble's Corners

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and school events and plowing matches, were prevalent in the busy community in the early days.

Mrs. Gauslin says some of the most well-known people in Claremont were the Grahams, noted for their world champion horses which they would parade from the station in the spring.

And she devoted a chapter in her 1974

history to Dr. Nelson Tomlinson, the hamlet doctor for many years and "a man we couldn't do without".

The Keevil family was well-known in the hamlet, starting a speciality store and then the Keevil News in 1948, a four-page paper which eventually became the Claremont News.

Mrs. Gauslin's decision to write a Claremont history was a direct result of the proposed

Pickering airport which ate up much of northern Pickering's land right up to, but thankfully not including, Claremont.

Mrs. Gauslin had much information that she had collected through the years and had no problem compiling the book.

Presently, there are about 750 people in the hamlet of Claremont and more are moving there because of the small-town atmosphere the

community provides, says Mrs. Gauslin.

The entire town is like a page out of history with many old buildings still standing, mostly

homes and of course, the Claremont Corner Store.

Mrs. Gauslin says she is happy to see more homes sprouting up in Claremont which will

hopefully bring about more services, services Claremont had at the turn of the century.

"Claremont is a pretty little village - peaceful and quiet since

the new by-pass had taken care of heavy traffic of the gravel trucks that frequented the Brock Road," concluded Mrs. Gauslin near the end of her book.