



Local History File  
**Greenwood**  
**(Ont.)**  
For Reference

The History  
of Greenwood Conservation Area

Prepared by Chris Robinson  
August 16, 1994

Greenwood Conservation Area

Metro Toronto Region Conservation Authority

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Judith Goulin from the Pickering Public Library's Local History Room for providing invaluable maps of early Pickering Township. I would also like to thank Judy Muzzi from the Pickering Museum Village for her time, and use of her historical resources.

## Introduction

This research report is a general history of Greenwood Conservation Area. Some of the historical data presented may not pertain directly to the history of Greenwood Conservation Area, but provides some general history of the local area. A serious limitation of this report is the lack of resource material on the Greenwood Area.

## Geological History

Before the onset of the glacial period, Pickering and the surrounding area was part of a "broad plane tilted toward the centre of the continent" (McKay, Pickering Story 1). A great river, along with its tributaries, flowed westwardly through what is now the bed of Lake Ontario. These waterways drained the area, connecting with a river system that flowed to the Gulf of Mexico (1).

Glaciers covered this plain on five separate occasions leaving rubble, clay and boulders. There were two glacial lobes in the area, one in the present Lake Ontario basin, and the other in the Oak Ridges. As the Oak Ridges lobe moved it pushed huge amounts of rubble. Streams formed as the glaciers melted, carrying sand and gravel which was deposited in the area (1). As a result of this geological movement, today there are sand and gravel extraction around the Greenwood-Uxbridge area.

The glaciers also formed the Oak Ridges Moraine watershed and a plain further south. As temperatures further warmed, this plain was covered by a lake, Lake Iroquois. The conservation

area at one time was covered by Lake Iroquois as the lake's shoreline ran from the Scarborough Bluffs, passing about two miles south of the town of Greenwood (3).

With time the glaciers retreated further, causing Lake Iroquois to recede and forming Lake Ontario. Streams then began to flow from the high ground further north carving valleys in the local landscape (3).

### Early Human History

Archaeological artifacts have been discovered along Duffin's Creek and the surrounding waterways, some dating back to the Laurentian period. An entire village was found on a sandy ridge near Duffin's Creek, likely the shoreline of Lake Iroquois (4-5).

During the 1600's the Iroquois nation lived around Lake Ontario and its waterways. They supplied the Europeans with fur for export back to Europe.

There was a French presence in the area, dating back to their explorations and trade in the New World. They named Petticoat, originally "Petite Cote" Creek, for the creek's east bank is high while the west bank is flat, creating an inlet with the "little side" (16). The French also named the Rouge River, and the Riviere au Saumon, the latter now named the Duffin's Creek.

## The Land

In 1791, Pickering Township consisted of "[d]ense forests rising in terraces from the lakefront to the Oak Ridges moraine", with many little streams and creeks forming Duffin's Creek, Petticoat Creek and the Rouge River (22). To the settlers, their land was a symbol of new hope, but the forests stood in the way of their dreams. The dense stands of trees were regarded as an enemy, something that had to be defeated. The woods inhibited farming and agriculture, the settlers' means of survival, while also housing animals which at times attacked the livestock (Bryant, "The Pickering Museum" 7). Such beliefs fuelled the exploitation and decimation of the forest.

## Duffin's Creek

The French named the creek Riviere au Saumon because of the abundant salmon population (Pickering Story 16). However, with onset of settlement from 1800 to 1900 the salmon disappeared from Lake Ontario (16). The creek's present name is named after the Irish trader who was said to be murdered near the present village of Pickering, probably sometime before 1791 (20).

Duffin's Creek is one of the reasons why Greenwood Village was such a thriving commercial centre. It was a source of water and fish, while its high banks and fast flow providing the ideal landscape for milling. The creek later provided the town with electricity, far before most rural communities had such power.

## Greenwood Village

The early settlers to the Greenwood area were predominantly from Yorkshire, England and Northern Ireland. In 1852, the village name was changed from Norwood, its original name, to Greenwood (Heart, Local History). The change of name was in honour of the Green family, a family instrumental in the development of the village.

## Early Development

From the late 1700's to the 1800's much of the land was cleared (Pickering Story). The land was used for agriculture, forestry, mineral extraction and water. Food was obtained from farming and hunting. "During the 1820's, much of Pickering Township had developed into a thriving agricultural society" ("Pickering Museum" 8).

In the mid 1800's Greenwood became a booming commercial centre. Many mills were built along the Duffin's Creek for lumber, flour and oatmeal. As of 1861, there were two sawmills within Greenwood Conservation Area along the creek (Pickering Story 127). By 1850 the village had two flour and grist mills, four sawmills, a cooperage, a distillery and several creameries. However, the onset of the motor age brought about Greenwood's decline. Motor transportation made other areas in Ontario more attractive for commerce. As a result, the mills closed and a majority of the business left.

### Lower Mill

Greenwood's Lower Mill was situated on Duffin's Creek, on the north half of Lot 12, Concession 5, north of Greenwood Conservation Area. It was west of Greenwood Road, a quarter of a mile south of the Greenwood Road-Concession 6 intersection. Presently a home is located on the mill site, appropriately named "The Mill".

The Lower Mill was established by the English miller, Frederick Green, one of Greenwood's most prominent figures, and the man whom the town was named after. Green purchased the land for the mill on February 3, 1843, from another Englishman, Matthew Cockerline. Grain was milled at this site, and later in 1887, oatmeal was milled. The grain was transferred to warehouses in Frenchmen's Bay and Port Union for shipment.

Miller Green, later known as Squire Green, built a dam to divert the river flow, creating a large five acre body of water behind the dam. However a flood destroyed the dam causing the closure of the mill after 50 years of operation. Consequently, the Upper Mill further upstream became the new mill (McLean and McLean, Greenwood Through 30-3).

### Cooperage

Just north of Greenwood Conservation Area, in the northwest corner of Lot 13, Concession 5, stood a cooperage where barrels were made and repaired. Robert Lennon of Kilkenny, Ireland, and Henry Shea of Ireland were the cooperage partners (39-40).

## Saw Mill

There were several saw mills operating in the area during Greenwood Village's booming years. One such mill was located east of the conservation area's Roddar Property on Duffin's Creek (south half of Lot 15, Concession 5). It was operated by George Ballard (44).

The Lower Mill was established by the English miller, Frederick Green, one of Greenwood's early prominent citizens, and the area where the town was named after. Green purchased the land for the mill in February 2, 1841, from another Englishman, Nathan Goodwin. Grain was milled at this mill and later in 1847, natural gas milled. The grain was transported to warehouses in Toronto, by way of the Union for shipment. Miller Green, later known as George Green, built a dam to divert the river flow, creating a large five acre body of water behind the dam. However, a flood destroyed the dam causing the closure of the mill after 20 years of operation. Consequently, the Upper Mill further upstream became the new mill (44) and is now Greenwood through 20-21.

## Cooperage

Just north of Greenwood Conservation Area, in the northwest corner of Lot 12, Concession 5, stood a cooperage where barrels were made and repaired. Robert Jones of Kilmenny, Ireland, and Henry Jones of Ireland were the cooperage partners (44-45).

## Early Greenwood Families

### Concession 4

#### **Lot 10, Concession 4: (east of Westney Road)**

- William Gibson (1850)
- William Gibson- son of George Gibson
- Norman Gibson -son of William
- 1940's-William and Bridget Lanson bought property
- 1957-sold to G.C. Jones

#### **South half Lot 9, Concession 4:**

- George Gibson-son of William (1877)

### South Half of Concession 5

#### **Lot 11, Concession 5: (east of Greenwood Road, half a lot from Roddar Property)**

- 1852-Samuel Somerville and wife Marion Wilson; Lanarkshire, Scotland; bought 100 acres of Crown Land from province of Upper Canada for 93 pounds and 15 shillings
- Nov. 5, 1895- John Anan bought property (Samuel Somerville died)
- Nov. 15, 1895- Robert A. Somerville (Samuel's son) bought property
- 1921- William Ormerod bought from Robert Somerville

#### **Lot 12, Concession 5: (straddles Greenwood Road; left half of property is part of Roddar Property)**

- 1848-Elmsley sold this 100 acres to James Demorest
- 1851-sold to George Ballard
- before 1860- Ballard sold 30 acres east of Low Road (Greenwood Road) to George Hicks
- 1895- Mrs. Matthews owned 30 acres
- Mr. George Gibson farmed here
- George Ballard sold 70 acres west of Low Road (Greenwood Road) to Thomas Pugh

#### **Lot 13, Concession 5: (part of Roddar Property)**

- Thomas Pugh owned 100 acres (south half)

#### **Lot 14, Concession 5: (may be part of Roddar Property)**

- Thomas Pugh owned 100 acres (south half)
- 1895-Mrs. Hamilton owned 100 acres

#### **Lot 15, Concession 5: (west of Roddar Property)**

- 1860's- George Ballard (sawmill proprietor) owned southern 50 acres
- 1877- Mrs. George Ballard
- 1895- Isaac Connor

## North Half of Concession 5

**Lot 11, Concession 5:** (east of Greenwood Road, half a lot from Roddar Property)

- 1849-James Demorest sold one acre to James Sterling
- 1857-James Sterling resold to Hugh McConachie
- 1859-Margaret Sisley bought property

**Lot 12:** (north of Roddar Property)

- Benjamin Hallowell owned 100 acres
- Hon. John Elmsley
- 1838 -Matthew Cockerline- built grist mill (Norwood's oldest industry)
- Feb. 3, 1843-Frederick Green bought land and mill (Lower Mill) for 1200 pounds
- 1843-"Low Road" (now Greenwood Road) built from Greenwood Village to haul grain from the mill

**Lot 13:** (north of Roddar Property)

- cooper shop run by Robert Lennon and Joseph Shea
- 1877- J. Hamilton owned northern 100 acres
- 1898-sold to Ellen Gleeson
- 1898 -sold to Miss Georgina Pengelly and her brother William Pengelly Sr. (tanner)
- house further back on farm

**Lot 14:** (northwest of Roddar Property)

- 1836- William Reynolds owned the northern 100 acres
- Moses Wilson owned the property
- Robert Cathcart owned the property
- 1852- John Devitt was owner
- 1902- Matthew Devitt (John's son) was owner
- McNabb
- William Knox
- Arch Gibson
- 1927- Mr. and Mrs. John Soden were owners
- 1960- Karl, Anne and Chris Lensen owned the property

(Greenwood Through the Years 58-73).

### Greenwood Social Groups

The following is a list of some of the early local social groups:

- Young Man's Brotherhood
- Ladies' Aid
- Women's Missionary Society
- Young People's Union
- Agricultural Society.
- Sons of Temperance.

### The Railway Through Greenwood

On Monday October 9, 1911, the Canadian Northern Railway opened the Toronto-Trenton Railway Line, which spanned the valley through the existing Greenwood Conservation Area. The 110.5 mile journey took four hours to travel, and served both passengers and freight. The train was pulled by a single engine. The remnants of the railway bridge are still visible today in the conservation area, particularly in the winter when there is little valley foliage.

One eastbound and one westbound train travelled the line daily. The passenger stops were as follows: Union Station, Queen Street, Rosedale, Malvern, Cherrywood, Greenburn, Brooklin, Oshawa, Bomanville, Orono, Cobourg, Grafton, Colbourne, Brighton and Trenton. Greenburn Station was located a little east of the lookout at Greenwood Conservation Area Park. A spur line branched off to the mining pit of Greenburn Sand and Gravel Company situated on Lot 8, Concession 5, east of the conservation area's Roddar property. However, in 1936 the Toronto-Trenton Line was discontinued and the tracks lifted because of declining business caused by the rise of motor transportation (Greenwood

Through 28-9).

### Greenwood Park

One of the earliest mentions of a recreation area in Greenwood Village was Greenwood Park. In 1937 the idea for Greenwood Park was given a boost by the Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, Dr. Herbert A. Bruce. Two acres on the highway, formerly the past Mitchell farm (Mitchell leased the Green property), was in the town's hands and set aside for a public park in honour of the Viscount Greenwood, a former cabinet minister. The Lieutenant-Governor agreed to the park because open spaces like the then proposed park, would be a future reality in all modern planned towns, and would improve the health and happiness of community life (photo scrapbook, Pickering Library Historical Room).

Several live music venues and other events were held at the Greenwood Park.

However, using the above mentioned directions, it is unlikely that Greenwood Park was on the site of the existing conservation area but rather, it was probably in Greenwood Village itself.

### Reforestation Project

Much of the land in Greenwood Conservation Area was cleared during the early settlement of the area. The existing trees in the conservation area were replanted at some point. In August 1938 the Provincial Forestry Department implemented a

reforestation project in Vivian, York County and Uxbridge, Ontario County (Scrapbook, Pickering Library) which may have included the replanting of parts of the existing conservation area's property.

### The Greenwood Conservation Area Embarrassment

In 1958 the Metro Toronto Region Conservation Authority (MTRCA) assembled 300 acres (121 hectares) to establish the existing conservation area in north Ajax. The Greenwood residents had decided upon naming the conservation area after the town. A MTRCA sub-committee responsible for the planning of the opening of the conservation area changed the name to A.H. Richardson Conservation Area, in honour of the pioneer of the conservation movement and the MTRCA's first chairman. However, this decision was made without formal confirmation.

When the local residents learned of the change, they mounted a protest. The MTRCA embarrassingly reverted back to naming the park Greenwood Conservation Area for its opening on August 6, 1958 (Richardson, Conservation).

### Greenwood Conservation Area's Opening

The MTRCA officially opened Greenwood Conservation Area on August 6, 1958. Greenwood was the fifth conservation area to be opened for public use, and the largest park under the Authority at the time ("New Park Will", Ajax Advertiser).

The total area of Greenwood Conservation Area upon its opening was 375 acres. One hundred acres was turned over to the

MTRCA by Ontario County, who were bequeathed with the property by the late Arthur Percy, with the condition that the land be preserved as a wildlife sanctuary. The Authority acquired the additional 275 acres by purchasing four adjacent properties at a cost of \$71,200 ("New Park Will").

Two-thirds of the conservation area was covered with oak, pine, cedar and elm. Original activities in the park were family picnics, fishing, swimming, and flora and fauna study on the nature trails.

#### Ontario County Conservatives Rally

On Saturday August 23, 1958, Greenwood Park served as the site for the public picnic of the third annual summer rally of Ontario Conservatives. Two of the most prominent politicians present were the Hon. Michael Starr (Federal Labour Minister) and the Hon. Matt Drymond (Provincial Transport Minister). The day's events included a baseball game between the Members of Parliament and the Provincial Members of Parliament, and a horseshoe championship. Free coffee, tea, pop and ice cream were served at the picnic (Pickering News).

#### Other Land Uses of Greenwood Conservation Area

Greenwood Conservation Area's existing 283 hectares have been amassed by the MTRCA over the years. There was previously a 10 acre gravel pit off Greenwood Road and north of the North Flats. It is no longer used for extraction and has been planted with vegetation to assist in the natural recovery process.

Miller Paving owns a 17 acre plot of land within the conservation area boundaries. That lot is along the west bank of Duffin's Creek just south of Concession 5.

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