

WHAT'S INSIDE

► A painting by amateur artist Ebenezer Birrell, one of the most prominent citizens of Pickering Township in the middle years of the 19th century, has become one of the best-loved Canadian paintings of his era.

► Few families have survived in Pickering/Ajax as long as the O'Connors. The sign on their barn tells it all: "The O'Connors Since 1832." Part 1 of a 2-part report tells of the establishment of the family and of their Century Farm "Maplehurst".

► One of the earliest settlers in Pickering Township was Noadiah Woodruff who entertained British troops in his tavern on Kingston Road during the War of 1812. Pickering weather, not always appreciated by local residents, inspired one sometime-poet, Fred Houser, in 1916, to compose a verse to commemorate a perfect day in May.

► Oshawa's first settler owed a debt of gratitude to Pickering's first settler when he encountered Wabekisheco, Chief of the Mississauga Indians.

► A stroll through Whitevale Cemetery reveals much about the past of this Pickering hamlet now designated as a Heritage District.

PATHMASTER

NAMES IN THE NEWS: EBENEZER BIRRELL

Painting Pickering's Landscape

by John W. Sabeau

Charles Fothergill lamented in 1834 from his Pickering Village home that he did not have "one single neighbor in the country who has any pretensions to being an Amateur [painter] in this delightful art."¹ In fact, in that very year, Ebenezer Birrell (1800-1888), an amateur landscape painter from Scotland emigrated to Upper Canada and settled on the 7th Concession of Pickering, just a few miles north of fellow artist Fothergill.

Birrell was born in Kinrosshire, Scotland, in April 1800, to John Birrell, a manufacturer of parchment and vellum. The business had been in the family for several centuries—at least back to the sixteenth century—and Ebenezer was trained by his father in the trade.² However, it was his older brother David who was to carry on the family tradition, while Ebenezer

learned another occupation—surveying—which he practised while he still lived in Scotland. He appears to have been a well-educated man with an interest in both art and literature, and perhaps in the end the surveying business was not sufficient to sustain his interest. At any rate, at the age of 34, he said good-bye to family and homeland and set sail for the new world.³

Birrell quickly established himself once he arrived in Pickering Township. He purchased Lots 9 and 10 of Concession 7 early in October 1834, and immediately began to construct a log home.⁴ It was not long before he became active in community affairs. By 1839, he was already elected as a Commissioner of the Court of Requests.⁵ Later he was to serve as a Justice of the Peace, as president of the Pickering Agricultural Society and as founding president of the Ontario

County Agricultural Society,⁶ as local superintendent of education, as an elder and session clerk of the Claremont Presbyterian Church, and as a Lieutenant-Colonel of the Third Battalion of the Ontario Militia.⁷

Farming, however, was Birrell's chief occupation in Pickering. The agricultural census of 1851 is missing, but that of 1861 shows him to be a very successful farmer.⁸ He married Janet Mackey (or Mackie), and with her had five children before her untimely death in 1846. Margaret, Ebenezer's sister, came out to Canada to help him raise his family; he did not remarry. In



Good Friends, Mid-19th century. Oil on canvas, 58.4 x 71.1 cm. Art Gallery of Hamilton, gift of Mrs. R.N. Steiner in memory of her mother, Mrs. L.C. Dillon.

time he replaced the old log house with a new one which he named "Maple Hall."

Despite all this activity Birrell found some time to paint. How extensive his output was is not now known, but some indication of it may be gained from an examination

of five small books in which he jotted down notes of his various activities.⁹ The five are all that is left of 27 that he himself recorded; the notes cover a period from about 1825 to about 1880. Only recently was I shown these books and I have made only the briefest of perusals. Among their contents are: surveyors notes, an account of his voyage from Scotland to Upper Canada in 1834, lists of his paintings, and pencil and watercolour sketches of sites he visited in the Scottish Lowlands.

To date I have found ten of Birrell's paintings: five landscapes, two portraits, and three Biblical scenes.¹⁰ The Art Gallery of Hamilton owns one of each genre, *Good Friends*, *Portrait of a Man*, and *The Raising of Lazarus*; the Art Gallery of Windsor owns *The Village of Emmaus*; the other five (*Killavrick Castle*, *Pass of*



Tummel, Taymouth Castle, Loch Achray, Maria Regina Scotorum, and Samuel and Elö are in the hands of private collectors, a descendant of Birrell's and the descendant of a former neighbour of Birrell's. Only one of these paintings, *Good Friends*, is an original creation depicting Upper Canadian scenery.¹¹ The Biblical scenes and the portrait of Mary Queen of Scots were copies of paintings by other artists and were probably done by Birrell as learning exercises. The landscapes of the Scottish countryside were done first on the scene as pencil or pencil and watercolour sketches and later "painted up" in oils on canvas. In at least one case the painting was completed in Scotland (*Kilaverick Castle* in 1825) before Birrell came to Canada, but the others were probably all done here in Pickering based on his sketching notes.¹² It is unlikely that Birrell brought any of his paintings with him when he immigrated to Upper Canada in 1834, but a few may have been carried out by his sister Margaret when she came out in the 1840s.

Good Friends is by far the best known of Birrell's works.¹³ It was "discovered" in the mid-1960s, but the story behind its discovery I have not yet been able to piece together. It is very popular among visitors to the Art Gallery of Hamilton, especially among children, so I was told, who love the "square cows". So popular is it, and so well recognized that the gallery has reproduced it on their membership/donor brochure. These square cows, along with the horses, sheep, and geese, I remind everybody, are Pickering animals, raised on Birrell's farm. *Good Friends* has been exhibited widely across Canada and in the United States. One of the exhibitions was called "Masterpieces of Canadian Art" and was held at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1967.

One commenter said of *Good Friends*: "It is a painting of the by-ways, but the sincerity of the artist and the appeal of the familiar surroundings no doubt impressed his farming neighbours more than would a superb Rubens or Cuyt pastoral. Paintings which use indigenous subject-matter in this way are the real essence of the vernacular in art."¹⁴

Good Friends was probably one of the paintings Birrell exhibited in 1857 at the Upper Canada Provincial Exhibition. He also is known to have shown some of his Scottish landscapes at the same time. We also know that Birrell entered some of his paintings in a show in Whitby in 1876, but we have no record of other exhibitions in which he may have participated in between.¹⁵

Incidentally, in the Whitby show one of his four landscapes was entitled *Landscape With Cattle*; could this be what we now call *Good Friends*? Birrell also acted as an art judge both for the Upper Canada Art Council in 1854, and at the Upper Canada Provincial Exhibitions in 1854 and 1855.¹⁶

Another writer claims that "Birrell's direct approach to his subject matter, his vibrant colour and his ability to capture the texture and play of light in the early autumn foliage mark him out as a fascinating forerunner of Canadian landscape painting."¹⁷

Birrell died 27 February 1888, two months short of his 88th birthday. He was buried in the Claremont Union Cemetery, directly across the road from the birthplace of Tom Thomson.

For their help in preparing this article I must thank Tobi Bruce and Christopher Jackson of the Art Gallery of Hamilton, Charles C. Hill of the National Gallery of Art, Dennis Reid of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Robert McKaskell of the Art Gallery of Windsor, and 2 private collectors who wish to remain anonymous.

NOTES:

- 1 Letter to C. Daly, 18 June 1834, from Pickering Mills. Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, MS Collection 140, vol 24, p. 90.
- 2 Miller (1973), pp. 302-303, provides much information about the Birrell parchment business, citing some old sources.
- 3 A 39-page diary of his Atlantic crossing is still extant.
- 4 He later purchased the north 1/2 of Lot 11, Concession 7, and part of Lot 10, Concession 8.
- 5 Beers (1877), p. ix.
- 6 Beers (1877), p. xii.

- 7 Not the 4th Battalion as in some sources. His commissioning certificate is reproduced in McKay (1961), p. 152.
- 8 P. 24, #41. Some of the data: 160 acres under cultivation; value of farm: \$1400; value of implements: \$500; value of livestock: \$1045.
- 9 The notebooks are now in the hands of Birrell's great granddaughter.
- 10 I have seen 9 of the 10, all except *The Village of Ennais*, but Robert McKaskell of the ARW was kind enough to send me a card which reproduces this work.
- 11 Harper (1977), pp. 107, 166-167.
- 12 Inscription on *Kilaverick Castle*: "In 1822 from a painting by J.E. Williams Edin. & copied 1825 by E. Birrell."
- 13 Reproduced in colour in Harper (1974), p. 75.
- 14 Harper (1974), p. 5.
- 15 Entry in notebook: "Mem* 7 Sept 1876. Sent to enter paintings at the Exhibition South Ontario Whitby 4 landscapes"
- 16 Harper (1963), p. 31; Miller (1973), p. 304.
- 17 Lord (1974), p. 69.

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LAST ISSUE'S WHAT'S IT?

by Dave Marlowe

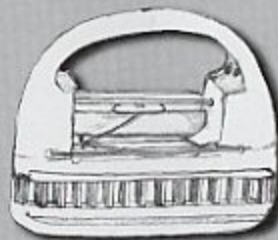


ANSWER :

The owner of this artifact does not know what it is, and no one has come forward with a definitive suggestion. One reasonable solution has been proposed. Could this be a type of button hook?

The wooden end is fairly obviously a handle. The flexible metal end and loop are not strong enough to button shoes, but the tool may have been designed to button shirts or dresses. Doing up the numerous small buttons used on clothing in the past was a tedious and delicate task—could this tool have provided help?

THIS ISSUE'S WHAT'S IT?



This month we have another undefined "What's It", and the owner seeks our help in guessing its use. The main body of this item is wood. The overall dimensions are: 14 cm wide by 11 cm high. The ridged or corrugated section appears to be of some manufactured material. The article was purchased at an auction in Claremont. The previous owner did not know its use, either; nor did any of the interested bystanders! Can a reader of *Pathmaster* solve this mystery?

Items submitted by
Jill Wollin of Claremont.

FIRST TOWN MEETING

by John W. Sabeau

Henry Gawman raises the question of the dating of the first Pickering Township meeting—1801 or 1803—as reported by different historians.

A look at other sources of Pickering's history confuses the issue even more. Working backwards we find that Gauslin (1974), p. 4, dated the meeting from 1803, but located Munger's house on Lot 7, Con 2; Johnson (1973), p. 61, citing Farewell (1907) as his source, dates the meeting as 4 June 1801; McKay (1961), p. 33, says the meeting was held 4 June 1803, at Munger's, Lot 16, Con 2 "which he leased for a few years before moving north to the vicinity of Salem"; Wood (1911), p. 17, quotes from the "earliest municipal record extant" as "A record of a meeting for choosing the town officers and other regulators for the towns of Pickering and Whitby held at the house of Samuel Munger in Pickering, March, 7th day, 1803." To further complicate matters, the Centennial Map created by the (first) Pickering Township Historical Society, locates the first meeting at Munger's house at Lot 7, Con 6 (Smith, 1967).

The locating of the meeting at on the 6th Concession was probably derived from Farewell (1907), p. 12, who says:

"This township [Pickering] was formerly joined with Whitby Township, one of the earliest records relating to the township matters is dated 4th of June, 1801. It is a record of the first of the old town meeting days, entitled 'A record of a meeting for choosing town officers and other regulators for the Towns of Pickering and Whitby, held at the house of Samuel Munger, now the Judson Gibson farm, in Pickering, near Salem.'"

Note, however, that the quotation of the title was never closed, and it is not clear, therefore, that the latter part of the sentence, placing the meeting at the house which is "now the Judson Gibson farm" was Farewell's own addition.

The solution to this conflicting evidence made be found (apart from examining the manuscript record of the Township) in looking at the earliest printed source we presently have: Beers (1877).

On page viii it says: "The earliest record of [Whitby] township matters we are enabled to find is in an old township book giving the marks of cattle, sheep and hogs 'belonging to the inhabitants of Pickering and Whitby.' This commences on the 4th June, 1801. We extract the following as the first record-

ed minutes, retaining the original orthography: 'A Record of a meeting for chusing the town Officers and other Regulators for the towns of Pickering and Whitby held at the house of Samuel Munger in Pickering— March 7th Day, 1803....'"

It is clear from the statement in Beers (1877) that the earliest record dates to 4 June 1801. What is not clear is whether there had been a town meeting to (1) determine the animal markings and/or (2) to take a census and choose a Collector of taxes. Eleazer Lockwood collected the taxes in 1802, and was audited in April? 1803 (Beers, 1877, p. viii).

The recording of the minutes of the meeting at Samuel Munger's house was for a meeting on 7 March 1803, and this, then, is the earliest record of a town meeting for Pickering. It was, of course, a joint meeting with Whitby. The first town meeting for Pickering alone took place in 1811. But were there other joint meetings between 1803 and 1811?

As to the place, we know that the Mungers were still in Pickering Village or Duffins Creek as late as 1805, because of a story which appeared in the *York Gazette* in that year (see

McKay, 1961, p. 33).

It is instructive sometimes to follow the history back from the latest to the earliest sources to see what and how errors creep into the record. In the above instance, some of the mistakes appear to be simply clerical, but others appear to be a misunderstanding of sources. The placing of the meeting on the 6th Concession instead of properly on the 2nd was a matter of letting later events interpret earlier ones.

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MAKING OUR OWN HISTORY

The audience at our June meeting was treated to a house call by noted 18th century medical practitioner B. Barkley-Fynche. His informative discourse included vivid descriptions of "current" treatments such as blood-letting, purging and the use of emetics as keys to Good Health. Barkley-Fynche was accompanied by his "long suffering" wife who passed along her impressions of the colonies and instructed the assembly on the subject of medicinal plants and herbs. Their presentation cutting-edge methodology will not soon be forgotten, even in this environment of shrinking health care. B. Barkley-Fynche is the *non de guerre* of Bruce Finch; his wife is Diane Finch.

In July, along with the Pickering Museum Village and the Writers' Circle of Durham, the Society co-sponsored an Ontario Historical Society workshop

entitled "Writing and Publishing Community History." Participants were taken through the process by acknowledged pros, conducted in the special atmosphere of the Museum Village's Chapel. Dorothy Duncan, OHS Executive Director and former Brougham resident, started the session with a talk on "Researching Your Local History." She was followed by Kirk Howard, president of heritage publishers, The Dundurn Group, who discussed "Publishing for the Trade Market."

After lunch, regional author and storyteller Sher Leetooze presented do-it-yourself side of the publishing game with "Writing and Publishing Your Own Work." Finally, Marjory Greene shared some of her experiences in contributing to the recently published *A Town Called Ajax*. Her discussion was entitled "Creative Writing in Non-Fiction".

We are eagerly anticipating submissions to *Pathmaster* from newly inspired participants.

The theme of this year's Spirit Walk at the Pickering Museum Village was the Rebellion of 1837. As much as possible, the scriptwriters incorporated the actual words of the historical characters whom they had invoked for the evening.

What made the event extra special was the presence of Richard and Rose Matthews of Caro, Michigan. Richard is a direct descendent of Peter Matthews, the local resident who paid the ultimate price for his role in the rebellion. Peter was posthumously pardoned by Queen Victoria, but Richard was gratified to see that his forebear is finally being recognised for his sacrifice to the building of this nation. Richard and Rose also left in the care of the PTHS a pair of monogrammed silver spoons which had

belonged to Peter and Hanna Matthews. They were donated with the proviso that they be exhibited to "the people of Pickering, especially school children, in the hope they will help bring their local history alive." We are hoping to display them at the History Room of the Pickering Central Library and feel certain that they will provide a genuine touchstone to our past.

Richard also provided us with a copy of his family history, parts of which are new to us and will be incorporated into next year's Spirit Walk. The Matthews retain an emotional attachment to the land of Richard's ancestors, moreover it is a pleasure to note the pride with which Richard affixes the initials U.E. (for United Empire Loyalist) to his signature. To the Matthews, we thank you both for your generosity and we hope to see you again next year!

The Battle for GANDATSETIAGON

by Tom Mohr

Matters of Cultural Heritage have been heating up on our western borders of late. As most are aware, Pickering has long claimed the site of Gandatsetiagon as our own. This short-lived 17th century Seneca village represents the expansionist aims of the Iroquois Confederacy, the terminus of one of the great native trading networks, as well as the site of French missionary and fur trading activity. It was also a microcosm of European intrigue. Oral history has long placed this continental cross-roads on our very own Frenchman's Bay. Lamentably, though, this wonderful tale is getting less credence of late. An analysis of the historical material placing Gandatsetiagon on the Bay reveals that our information seems to derive from one late 19th century source whose data simply cannot be verified.

On the other hand, recent (and not so recent) archaeological activity places a late 1660s-era Seneca village site on the western bank of the Rouge River, near the forks. The nature of the artifacts leaves no doubt as to the veracity of this statement, and we must therefore be content to look west of the Bay for Gandatsetiagon. Today this location is deemed so culturally significant that it has been recommended as a National Historical Site. However, having now turned our attention to the Rouge, should we completely accept the new paradigm?

One of our local residents, Marion

Martin, refuses to. She has challenged the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), concerned that their land-use policies at the mouth of the Rouge threaten significant First Nations archaeological remains. Citing map evidence, historical documentation, and archaeology, she feels that the south-east river bank has the potential to prove even more important than the northern site.

Her battle has not been easy. Granted, the old French maps are not as precise as we'd like to see and the historical evidence can be ambiguous as well. Still, for a quick indication of the possibilities, I invite the reader to consult pages 204 & 205 of William McKay's *The Pickering Story*. The first-hand commentary by Mr. Cowan regarding the discovery of a post contact-era site on his property cannot be disputed.

Marion's investigation reinforces the very high likelihood that First Nations occupations, perhaps even an early site for Gandatsetiagon, existed at the mouth of the Rouge. Iroquois villages moved at regular intervals for consistent reasons. We cannot ignore the probability that the whole area is highly sensitive from a heritage standpoint.

This recognition is important. One

cannot in good conscience declare one aspect of this village to be worthy of preservation and celebration, and then bulldoze the rest. Neither can we dismiss the historical integrity of any other native group, be they Huron, Seneca, or Mississauga, who may have chosen the mouth of the Rouge for their home.

Certainly, there has been a continued succession of inhabitants on these lands, and much of the area has been disturbed since native times. If these properties are to be put back into private ownership, though, areas which have survived relatively unscathed should be sought out and protected. Various aspects of legislation call for such procedures, but it is imperative that the TRCA conduct a detailed archaeological assessment of the entire area in question before divesting itself of any more local holdings. Let's examine the cultural landscape and not just take it on a lot-by-lot basis.

Marion has used the phrase "cultural amnesia" to describe the current lack of attention given our collective past, recognising how it often seems to be politically incorrect to celebrate our nation's formative processes. Admitting that she has "ruffled a few feathers" in her battle to maintain the natural and cultural integrity of the Rouge, she is taking her concerns to several levels of government. If

this issue is important to you, express your concerns to Gord Weeden at the Rouge Park (416) 288-0UGE, Don Prince of the TRCA at (416) 661-6600 and Pickering Mayor Wayne Arthurs at (905) 420-6600.

Archaeological resources are particularly sensitive to the pressures of development and once gone, cannot be retrieved. If such resources remain at the Rouge, as a caring community we should take ample opportunity to examine the sites, interpret their significance, and clear them in advance of the bulldozers. We will keep the readership apprised of developments (in both senses of the word).

In the meanwhile, the PTHS has also been involved as a commenting agency for both the Rouge Park Interpretative Programme and the Rouge Watershed Heritage Management Plan. The Rouge River system is an important aspect of our cultural identity, yet we tend to forget its presence at our western doorstep. It is my personal wish that we recognise Gandatsetiagon and the Rouge by naming the western part of our proposed trail system The Seneca Trail as a permanent reminder of this aspect of our aboriginal heritage.

Late Update: The TRCA recently re-tested the properties in question, and discovered only two flakes of chert. Even so, the Society commends the TRCA for responding to public concern by being doubly certain that no significant archaeological resources were threatened on these sites.

A Poem of Peace

IN A TIME OF WAR

Introduction by John W. Sabean

In 1916 when this poem was written, Frederick Broughton Housser was a clerk at the Central Loan and Savings Company in Toronto. In October of the previous year, he and his wife of one year purchased a home on 19 acres [7.7 hectares] in Pickering Village.¹ There in the spring of the year, while war raged in Europe, he walked with his wife on the back of their lot and found a day so perfect he had to set it to verse.

Ten years later Fred Housser wrote *A Canadian Art Movement*, the first history of the Group of Seven. By that time he had become the financial editor of the *Toronto Daily Star* where his column was known as "Housser in The Star." He had also become a familiar figure in art circles where he was a member of the Art Gallery of Toronto and of the Arts and Letters Club, and his wife Bess wrote an art column in the *Canadian Bookman*.² Fred's brother Harry was later the President of the Toronto Stock Exchange and their father had been for many years the Secretary of the Massey-Harris Company.³

1 On Lot 13, Con. 2, fronting on Kingston Road. The house, much altered, still stands and is now 456 Kingston Road West.

2 See my article on Fred and Bess Housser in *Pathmaster* 1(1):8.

3 A copy of the poem is part of the Doris Speirs Estate, now in the collection of Dr. J. Murray Speirs.



A DAY IN MAY

A day in May
When the birds are gay,
And the fields are green
With the growing hay,
We wandered together —
A day in forever.

Violets and trilliums
Were smiling in millions.
We walked on a carpet
Of purple and bloom;
We wandered together,
A day in forever,
Forgetting the world
With its struggle and gloom.

Not a cloud marred the beauty
Within or without us,
Our hearts beat in time
To the day all about us,
As we wandered together,
A day in forever.

The rabbits were playing,
The brook to us saying,
"Come, join in the song
That I sing you today.
Two lives together
Can go on forever
Expressing their love
Like a day in May."

"Both one to the other,
And each to his brother
May sing out the song
Of the birds and the trees.
Two lives together
May go on forever
Keeping their thoughts
Like a day in May."

Fred Housser
Pickering, May 1916

CHIEF WABBEKISHECO OF THE MISSISSAUGAS

by John W. Sabeau

The story of the sinking of the schooner *Speedy* in 1804 near present-day Presqu'île Provincial Park is an oft-told tale, and one, I might add, which has been greatly embellished over the years. The principals in the affair came from Oshawa and Toronto, and from among the Mississauga Indians. However, there are also some Pickering connections to the story.

John Sharp, factor for the fur-trading brothers A. Moody and William Farewell, was murdered near Scugog Island sometime in 1804.¹ Charged with the murder was one Ogetoncut, a member of the Mississaugas from whom the Farewells purchased their furs.² Since it was determined by survey that the crime was committed, not in the Home District, where most of the court attendees lived, but in Newcastle District, the court had to be moved to that jurisdiction. The case, then, was to be heard at Newcastle, a town-in-the-making near Brighton, and the accused, along with judge, lawyers, other court officials, and witnesses, were to be transported aboard the government schooner *Speedy* under Captain Thomas Paxton. The *Speedy*, however, never arrived at its destination; it was

blown off course and sank with all hands in a storm.

The grand chief of the Mississaugas at the time, whose authority extended from the Humber River to the Bay of Quinte, was Wabbekisheco.³ His involvement in the above incident was in turning over the accused to the authorities. Immediately after the murder, the Mississauga band, Ogetoncut along, journeyed down the Scugog Portage to Annis Creek in present-day Oshawa and along the lake shore to Toronto Island in what was to be one of the last recorded fur-trading expeditions in the area.

The authorities were notified of Ogetoncut's presence and of his alleged crime. When they went out to arrest him Wabbekisheco co-operated fully with them, and, as one source expressed it: "took the culprit by the shoulder and delivered him up."⁴ What was in Wabbekisheco's mind at the time of the arrest we will probably never know, but certainly he was putting his trust in the white men to deal with the matter in a just and equitable way.

From all that I have read about Chief Wabbekisheco he appears to have been a wise, far-seeing, and just leader

of his people, and toward European settlers, who were, after all, trespassing on his tribe's traditional hunting ground, he reacted in a peaceful, conciliatory way.

Some ten years or more before the Sharp murder the first settlers in what is now the City of Oshawa (and in the former County of Ontario) arrived on the lake front and occupied an old fur-trader's hut.⁵ This was Benjamin Wilson and his family, who received from the government enough supplies to last them until they could produce their own food and other necessities.⁶

One day some Indians came and removed some of their provisions.⁷ The family were, of course, distraught and fled the scene in the direction of Smith's Creek (Port Hope). At Smith's Creek they encountered Chief Wabbekisheco who returned with Wilson to the hut, and ordered the restoration of all Wilson's goods with sufficient payment for anything missing. In addition, the chief provided Wilson with a wampum belt as a token of peace; so long as the belt was kept in sight the family would suffer no further danger. As one version concludes: "And neither was there; the Indians became most friendly, and supplied the

family afterwards with abundance of venison and fish."⁸

So, what is the connection with Pickering? There are several versions of the story of Wilson's stolen supplies, but only a few, so far as I have uncovered, add the following information.⁹ William Peak was Pickering's earliest settler (along with his family) — settling here about the year 1800. But Peak was not newly arrived in the area. He had been for some years a fur trader and Indian interpreter and was operating out of the Smith's Creek area. And, he was a good friend of Chief Wabbekisheco, who was, no doubt, his principal trading associate.

When the Wilsons retreated to Smith's Creek and ran into the chief, it happened that the chief was at the time accompanied by William Peak. It was to Peak that Wilson poured out his story, and Peak interpreted for him to the chief. Because of Peak's timely intervention, Wilson got his supplies back and became "firmly established in his new home."¹⁰

In subsequent issues of *Pathmaster* I will recall some further connections of the *Speedy* incident to Pickering's history.¹¹

NOTES:

1. The earliest extant account of the murder of John Sharp known to me is: Farewell (1869), as quoted in "Pedlar Papers", frames 179-184. Unfortunately, the article is missing from the only existing copy of the newspaper. Scadding (1873), pp. 210-211, is a much more accessible source and adds only a few small details. These two accounts, certainly not the first, appear to have been derived from the same source. Other 19th-century accounts are contained in Beers (1877) and Belden (1878). However, the most complete and scholarly, although thoroughly readable account, now is O'Brien (1992), the only book-length study to date. O'Brien seems to have been unaware of Farewell (1869) and Beers (1877).
2. The alleged murderer's name is given with some divergence in the sources: Ogetoncut in the earliest sources Farewell (1869) and Scadding (1873), O-go-ton-og-cut in Beers (1877), O-go-ton-gat in Belden (1878), and Ogetonecut in Farewell (1907). Most of the sources greatly abuse Ogetoncut in condemning him even though he never had his day in court.
3. The name of the Mississauga chief is also

variously transliterated in the sources as Wabbekisheco (Beers, 1877), Wabokishees (Higgins, 1887), Waukikishko (Farewell, 1907), Wabakishchoe (Farewell, 1907), Wabakishoo (Farewell, 1913), and even Waab (Belden, 1878). I have chosen to go with the earliest spellings used in both Farewell (1869) and Scadding (1873).

4. Scadding (1873), p. 211.
5. The date of arrival of the Wilsons in Oshawa is uncertain. Some sources, e.g., Kaiser (1921), p. 5, give 1794; other sources, e.g., Hood (1968), p. 3, say 1790. Pedlar (c1890-1900), frame 34, argues for the earlier date on the basis of information derived from a descendant of the Wilsons. See also Meeker (n.d.).
6. To my knowledge the earliest account of the Wilson settlement, including the Wabbekisheco incident, is found in Beers (1877). Higgins (1887) includes both stories, but is derived almost entirely from Beers (1877). Pedlar (c1890-1900) provides another early account.
7. It is not certain what the intention of the Indians was. Some sources treat the matter as outright theft, based on a natural animosity between Indian and white settler. Other sources argue a simple misunderstanding, the Indians believing that

they were entitled to share what they found in the cabin.

8. Beers (1877), p. vii.
9. Farewell (1907), pp. 12, 18-19. The Peak connection is confirmed by Meeker (n.d.), p. 4, who simply says: "Then the chief told Wilson to take furs from their packs to make up for the missing goods. He thought Wilson did not take enough so he and Peake, the white agent, 'pulled furs' from the packs until Wilson was more than repaid."
10. Farewell (1913).
11. Of the above stories there are a number of traditions all of which must be carefully sifted by the historian.

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WHITEVALE CEMETERY

By Michael Cummins



Photo by Michael Cummins

represented by multiple stones.

The Whitevale cemetery stones demonstrate that individuals stayed in the community and raised many generations of their own families to continue living in Whitevale. The original stones are all made from limestone, all fashioned in the same manner. Some of the later limestone markers are larger than the earlier ones. Many are weathered and barely legible. Polished granite stones began to be common toward the end of the last century, and may have replaced some early grave markers. Some are elaborate and commanding stones, which suggest wealth and prestige in the community.

It is well known that child mortality was higher in the past. Around the beginning of the twentieth century, the deaths of four young children were recorded in the Whitevale cemetery, with one infant from the Noble family dying less than three months after being born.

A Major family stone reveals a curious and sad series of deaths of young adults. Lillie C. Robinson died in 1901 at age 23, Mary Maude Robinson died in 1901 at age 20, Margaret M. Robinson died in 1901 at age 18, and Emma A. Robinson died in 1902 at age 17.

The cemetery survey did not reveal any reason for a catastrophe. A review of the dates of death and the comparative ages of those who died in the same period might suggest that there was an outbreak of tuberculosis in the area. It remains a mystery as to exactly why these four young women died so close together, but what is more surprising is that their mother, Mary Major Robinson, lived for another twenty-five years after the last child, Emma, died.


In searching the cemetery, I discovered a stone lying on the ground which read "An Unknown Stranger 1854". This stone with its intriguing inscription was revealed to be that of a man who ven-

tured into the hamlet one day in 185-. He was passing through town when he stopped at the local hotel. As the story goes, the stranger was discovered dead the following morning in his room with no apparent reason for his sudden passing and without any form of identification which would allow the concerned citizens of Whitevale to inform his family of the tragedy. The citizens decided to bury him in the local cemetery.

◆◆◆◆◆
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One of the most interesting methods of understanding a community's history is to visit the local cemetery. A cemetery offers a perspective on a community which a book or picture cannot reveal. It is a good place to begin a research project, because the names of the deceased are carved in stone for all to see.

The Whitevale cemetery is located east of the hamlet on a plot of land once owned by the Major family (part of lot 28, concession 5). As is evident from a survey of the cemetery and the number of gravestones, a large number of the Major family settled and farmed in the surrounding area. Other families are also




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COMING EVENTS:

General Meetings of the Pickering Township Historical Society
Day: Second Tuesday of the month, September through June
Time: 7:30 p.m. **Place:** East Shore Community Centre, 910 Liverpool Rd.

FALL/WINTER SCHEDULE:

Tuesday, 13 October 1998
Guest speaker: Dennis Pollock
 Mr. Pollock, Head Groundskeeper at Black Creek Pioneer Village, will talk about the use early settlers made of native plants and what plants they brought with them to use for food, clothing, and medicine.

Tuesday, 10 November 1998
Guest speaker: Dr. Zebadiah Zonk
 Victorian phrenologist, Dr. Zonk, thinks we should have our heads read, and he is prepared to do it for us. He will both demonstrate the methods applied by his "science," and explain some of its history.

Tuesday, 8 December 1998
Guest speaker: Members Night
 This is your night to put on display items of historical interest that you have collected or that have been handed down in your family. You might also have some slides of a family reunion, local buildings of architectural merit, or perhaps a recent trip to an historical site. Or maybe you have some concerns about the preservation of Pickering's heritage that you would like to bring to our attention.

Tuesday, 12 January 1999
Guest speaker: Lorne Smith
 Markham's official town historian, Lorne Smith, will address the society on the history of the Berczy settlement.