



PATHMASTER

WHAT'S INSIDE

- ▶ *The bicycle craze struck Pickering Township in the 1890s. It was both a source of amusement and a potential source for disaster.*
- ▶ *Much of this issue focuses on the hamlet of Greenwood. Traveller continues his journeys through the township in search of sales and encounters the citizens of Greenwood.*
- ▶ *Two of the fixtures of nineteenth-century Greenwood were its Upper Mill and the British Arms Hotel.*
- ▶ *Progress can have both its beneficial and its down side. Milton Pegg reflected on some of the disadvantages of the widening of the Seventh Concession Road in 1969.*
- ▶ *Edgerton Pegg (1912-2003) is remembered as a man who lived life to the full—as a farmer, a sportsman, a musician, a traveller, and as a naturalist.*
- ▶ *We begin a series on Victorian-era crime in Pickering Township. In our first episode George Alger is convicted of insurance fraud. Was justice well served in this case?*

"On Sunday afternoon last Mr. Found was driving along the road east of Liverpool Market. Several bicyclists were racing, and owing to the bend in the road, came upon him unawares. The horse bolted into the ditch, throwing the occupants (Mr. Found and two young men) out, inflicting severe injuries, but not fatal. The horse freed itself from the buggy, completely destroying the harness. One of the bicyclists received very severe injuries. The injured ones were taken to Secker's hotel, where medical attention was secured, and the sufferer's wounds dressed. One of the bicycles was completely demolished."

Such, in 1884, was the first reference to bicycles in Pickering Township of which I am aware. The bicycle had come to stay in Pickering for good or evil.

The *Pickering News* from time to time reported on individuals who took up the sport of bicycle riding. "Bicycles are becoming very fashionable in the village [Pickering Village]. James Richardson, Jr., is now a cyclist in his own right and title," said

THE BICYCLE COMES TO PICKERING

by John W. Sabeau

Balsam Bicycle Club: Fred Disney, William Baldson, Fred Myer, Walker, Henry Madill, George Madill, Ira Lawrence and Willie Miller.

the *News* in April 1892.² And in Greenwood, "John Gerry now rides a new Massey Harris Bicycle, so girls look out."³ Nor was it just the boys to whom the bicycle appealed. In Claremont "Reeve [George] Gerow and J.H. Jobbitt [shoe store owner] spent the holiday learning to ride bicycles."⁴ We hope they did better than John Gregg, also of Claremont, who with "his wheel took a perch in a cedar tree near McFarlane's hill." But Mr. Gregg must have been a determined soul because the *News* added: "John will yet master the pesky thing."⁵

The ladies were not to be left out. In Claremont

"Miss Ella Patterson has a new bicycle and is now learning to ride."⁶ And in Audley, in the spring of 1892, several young ladies were contemplating the purchase of "safety" bicycles.⁷ As for Miss Reilly, school mistress at School Section #4 East, the bicycle was her means of getting to work.⁸

For a decade the bicycle remained an occasional sighting in the hamlets, and Pickering Village folk were still quite inquisitive when groups of riders passed through on their way from Toronto to Whitby or Port Hope (popular week-end runs). They had the occasional chuckle as well when the

grand entry did not go as planned. On one occasion "nine bicyclists came skimming into our town on their way from Toronto to Montreal. As they soared down the sidewalk, the wonder and envy of numerous small boys, one very unlucky young gentleman of the nine, ran his wheel into a crack in the sidewalk. He was going at full speed, so that when the wheel stopped short, he turned a complete summersault and lit on his shoulders some five yards away. The wheel of his bicycle was broken, but not very seriously."⁹

Then, in the mid-1890s it seemed the bicycle was everywhere. Ontario County began to emulate Toronto. The first reports were of a "bicycle epidemic ... raging in Oshawa and Bowmanville to an alarming extent." The *News* was happy to report, however, that "while there have been some light attacks of this disease here, it has not in a single instance proven fatal."¹⁰ Their smugness was premature, for only a week later their Claremont correspondent wrote: "The bicycle craze has struck our lit-

Lillian Goodwin. From Paths to Places (1974), p. 117.



the town and shaken her to the very foundations. The epidemic is rapidly spreading and in a few days few people will have escaped its ravages. The tornado that has just been reported from St. Louis was no more effective in its mission."¹⁰ Even in Green River it was soon reported that "Nearly every youth has a bicycle now."¹¹

Bicycles became a preoccupation from the spring through the fall months. Bicycle clubs were formed in almost every hamlet.¹² The Cherrywood correspondent noted

The Ruling Passion

Dr. Bones – 'Yes, my good man, you are dying fast.'
Biker – 'Hurry, then, and give me my cyclometer. I'll make a record or die trying.'

Pickering News 25 February 1898

wryly: "It is getting rather dangerous travelling on our streets in the evening. The junior bicycle club practices always between six and eight o'clock. No accidents have yet occurred but the ditches are getting filled with disabled wheels. Excessive use is the only cause."¹³ The practices were in preparation for weekend excursions to places like Toronto and Peterborough.

Some hearty individuals began to use the bicycle for long-distance journeys, which must have been extremely difficult given the condition of roads in those days. The *News* reported a traveller passing through town on a bicycle "loaded down, resembling a pack mule on a busy day."¹⁴ He was on his way to Manitoba and planned to wheel all the way. Pickering Village resident George Varty, in the summer of 1898, drove his bicycle to Michigan

to visit a cousin.¹⁵ And the summer before, Robert Forsyth of Claremont covered some 3000 miles [5000 km] on his bicycle.¹⁷

Racing bicycles also became a popular sport. Henry Cowan, who operated a summer resort at Rosebank, built a track—probably the first in Pickering Township—on his property in 1896. It created considerable interest, but, at least for that summer, the number of entries for the races was small.¹⁸ That would change in the years to follow. Henry Wood was reported as winning first prize in the bicycle race at Rosebank in June 1899, then went on to race at Malvern where he had to settle for second place.¹⁹

For both the long-distant cyclist and the racer there was soon developed a training machine—the stationary bicycle. It appeared as early as 1886, as reported by the *News*: "Items of Interest: A machine called the Buffalo home trainer has been invented, by which bicyclists can train in their own room. It is stationary."²⁰ And even the physically challenged, as we would say today, found a way to participate in the sport. The *News* reported "A cripple upon a tricycle visited our village

tumbling over until one fell into a ditch opposite St. Andrews Church and suffered a dislocated shoulder. Townspeople had to put him on a train back to Toronto."²²

Toronto Bicycle Club members found themselves involved in a case of road rage as they passed through Pickering Township. A Mr. Graham, who lived in the Rouge area, refused to make way for them. A fight ensued in which the cyclists appeared to hold their own until Graham called for

Friendly Advice

She — 'My bicycle has become an old story and I'm tired to death of it. What shall I do next?'
He — 'Learn to ride it.'

Pickering News 30 October 1896

assistance from Mr. Cullis. Graham and Cullis gave chase driving one of the cyclists to hide himself in the Gordon House in Pickering Village until the burly pursuers had departed. The *Pickering News* laid the blame on the cyclists.²³

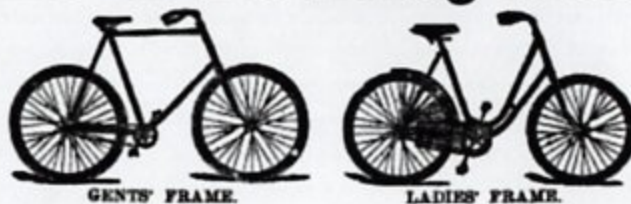
In an incident in Brougham "Some evil disposed person has distributed tacks upon our streets for the destruction of bicycle tires."²⁴ The *News* theo-

It wasn't long before bicycles became the object of theft. In one case a bicycle stolen in Markham was found near Claremont. A person was arrested but later acquitted; the culprit was probably never found.²⁵ On another occasion, a man from Oshawa attempted to sell his bicycle in Pickering Village. Only later was it discovered that the bicycle was rented and not his to sell. He was arrested in Toronto and the owner was able to recover his wheel.²⁶

The number of accidents involving bicycles increased rapidly as the popularity of the bicycle grew. Horses and buggies now had to share the road with these two-wheelers; their meeting on the road sometimes led to disastrous consequences. If a horse shied from a bicycle it could throw the wagon in the ditch—as in the incident at the beginning of this article. In that case it was the horse, the buggy and the buggy's occupants who were prone to injury. If, on the other hand, a bicycle and buggy collided it was usually the bicycle and rider that suffered the damage. Numerous incidents of both kinds are reported in the *News*.²⁷

Careless or reckless cycling could also lead to collisions of other kinds. Cows in the road were a hazard to bicyclists. In one instance a cow was tethered on one side of the road, but crossed to the other side to graze. As the bicyclist neared the tether rope the cow raised its head and the rope with it. The rider hit the rope and the bicycle collapsed.²⁸ Fortunately the rider was not seriously injured. On occasion bicycles collided with each other. Such,

E. & D. Bicycles



Wednesday evening and was watched with much interest by our more curious residents. The machine was propelled by the hands."²⁹

The introduction of the bicycle was not without its negative side, nor did all revel in its benefits. Mixed with alcohol, for example, bicycle riding could be disastrous. In one case a couple of young men from Toronto were riding rather high by the time they reached Pickering Village. They kept

rized that some juvenile must have been playing tricks, but it could just as easily have been an adult tired of having to dodge bicycles on the road.

for example, was the case when the Cherrywood senior bicycle club was out practicing one evening. Two riders ran into each other causing great damage to both bicycles and a severe cut

Dark Secret

'It is not dark enough yet,' she whispered as she peered eagerly up and down the street.

'There's no one in sight,' he replied after a careful survey.

'But someone may come round that corner at any minute and recognize us, and then I should want to die.'

'Well, then, we'll wait a bit.'

What dreadful deed did those two contemplate doing?

He was about to give her her first lessons in riding a bicycle."

Pickering News 28 April 1899

over the eye for one of the riders.²⁹

Pedestrian-bicycle collisions could also have severe consequences. When Miss Ida Campbell stepped out onto King Street in Pickering Village late afternoon in April she was knocked down by a bicycle travelling at high speed. Perhaps she couldn't see the bicycle coming in the twilight. Miss Campbell was severely shaken up, but not otherwise injured.³⁰ On another occasion in the village a child was knocked down by a bicyclist, but this time not on the road, but on the

sidewalk.³¹ The *News* chastised the rider for not confining his riding to the roadway.

In June of 1897 an accident occurred that resulted in the first recorded death in Pickering involving a bicycle collision. William Howlett was the rider of the bicycle. As he descended a hill along King Street in the village his front wheel became entangled with the wheel of a road cart. He was thrown off the bicycle and fell under the hoofs of the colt pulling the cart. He did not die instantly, but after getting up and walking for a short distance, he then had to be carried home where his condition worsened until death took him.³² He left a young wife and two small children.

As may be seen from the accompanying advertisements, by the latter half of the 1890s there were a number of bicycle manufacturers vying for the trade, and several general dealers in Pickering Village who featured bicycles among their wares. In addition to selling both new and used bicycles, Henry Savage set up a repair shop as well.³³

Once the "craze" was over the bicycle became common place in Pickering Township and after about 1900 items regarding bicycles no longer merited special attention from the newspaper.

Notes:

1 *Pickering News* [PN] 30 May 1884.

2 PN 8 April 1892.

3 PN 5 May 1899.

4 PN 29 May 1896.

5 PN 19 August 1898.

6 PN 5 June 1896.

7 PN 22 April 1892.

8 PN 19 August 1898. SS #4 East was located near what is now the intersection of Harwood Ave. and Kingston Rd.

9 PN 2 July 1886.

10 PN 29 May 1896.

11 PN 5 June 1896.

12 PN 16 June 1899.

13 Reference is made in PN to clubs in Pickering Village, Greenwood, Claremont, Cherrywood, and even Base Line East. See, e.g., PN 27 March 1896; 15 May 1896; 27 August 1897; 17 September 1897; 14 October 1898.

14 PN 17 September 1897.

15 PN 1 April 1898.

16 PN 9 September 1898.

17 PN 3 September 1897.

18 PN 19 June 1896.

19 PN 30 June 1899.

20 PN 5 February 1886.

21 PN 28 August 1896.

22 PN 17 June 1892.

23 PN 29 April 1892.

24 PN 8 July 1898.

25 PN 13 November 1896.

26 PN 12 May 1899.

27 See e.g., PN 17 September 1897; 7 August 1896; 22 October 1897.

28 PN 6 August 1897. Another cow-bike incident was reported in 30 October 1896.

29 PN 17 September 1897.

30 PN 29 April 1898.

31 PN 29 July 1898.

32 PN 11 June 1897.

33 PN 14 May 1897.

TRAVELLER VISITS GREENWOOD IN 1883

Ross Johnston, travelling salesman for the *Whitby Chronicle*, continues his tour of the hamlets of Pickering Township in 1883-1884. This account, written under the name "Traveller" is from 14 December 1883.

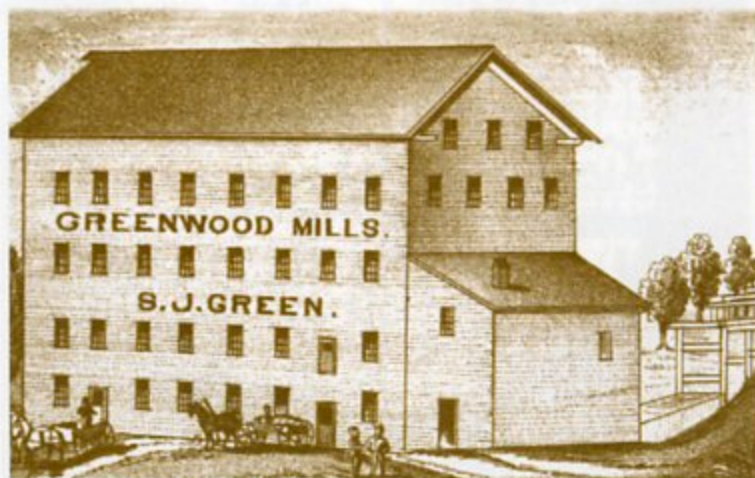
Greenwood's lovely glen, sparkling springs, grist mills, tannery, and minor industries — Rural post masters, much work and responsibility for little remuneration.

Greenwood, Dec. 10. I was about to close my last with a few words as to country Post Offices, but suddenly drew rein, lest my team should run away with me. As there is now less danger, I will resume the subject, giving it brief space. I learned, to my surprise, from Mr. Burton (postmaster at Green River) that he receives from the Government, in return for his services, the sum of \$24 a year.¹ What a miserable pittance for the important work done. Why, it is hardly enough to pay for the shop-room, leaving other considerations out of the question. True, the duties of the office are only light, but the position is one of much responsibility, and requires constant attention, and great care, and should surely be rewarded with something approaching a fair remuneration. I learn, on enquiry at other Post Offices, that Mr. Burton's case is not an isolated one. More the shame. Surely the scale on which such matters are measured is hardly constructed on an equitable principle, and sadly needs revision. I think my friend Harry Chapple

would pronounce the system rotten, and say it should be buried, like the path master system of doing road-work.²

Went eastward from Green River to Brougham, making as many turns, twists and wiggles on the way as would have done credit to the big water snakes at Frenchman's Bay. Staid all night with my good host, Poucher, and in the morning having visited this neighborhood previously, pushed forward towards the rising sun.³ Took an occasional run southward, and having reached the residence of Mr. James McCormack about noon I partook of his kind hospitality by way of a good substantial meal, and after a friendly talk marched onward.⁴

Oh! my legs, arms, back, sides and whole corporation. The afternoon's physical experience in traversing the Greenwood glen was something to be remembered. The springs of pure, cold, sparkling water, bubbling out of the hillsides, all along the heights, are also things to be remembered. The water is just delicious along the upper grounds, and I drank, and drank again. The memory of it will continue to be a well-spring of pleasure whenever I feel thirsty. I reached the Village about dark, and sought the shelter of



GREENWOOD MILLS, S. J. GREEN, PROP., GREENWOOD, PICKERING TP. ONT.

Illustration: Historical Site of Ontario County (Hercules, 1877)

the quiet inn kept by Mr. Gerow, where I received the kindest attention, and arose much refreshed the following morning.⁵ By the way, morning does not get down into the glen at a very early hour. This circumstance was much in my favor. Greenwood, like some other villages, seems to have seen better days, yet still it is a stirring little place, and the dwellers in the vale and on the hillsides are a sociable and kindly people. Croquet is a favorite amusement here, and finds votaries among all classes, and apparently at almost all hours of the day. That "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," is a proverb held in high respect here. The Village lies mainly on the descent of the hill going westward, and a long hill it is, with quite a valley at the bottom, through which runs the main branch of what is afterwards known as Duffins Creek. At the foot of the hill, occupying a prominent business position, we find Michael Gleeson, Esq., holding forth in the four-fold capacity of Division Court Clerk, Post master, telegraph operator and general store keeper. Michael is evidently appreciated as a business man. His many func-

tions remind one of "Boston's four-fold state." His store is well filled with general merchandise and he and his assistants seem to have their hands full in attending the wants of numerous customers.

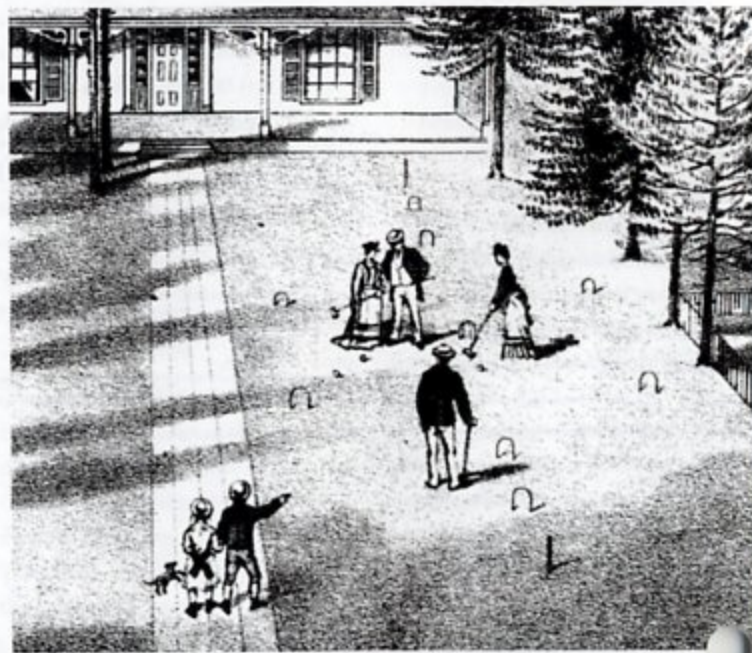
Messrs. Shae & Lennon are the coopers of the place, assisted by Mr. Carey (no relative of that other man),⁶ and the mills here give them most of their work, and good work they do. Mr. John Teefey conducts the shoemaker's department in the business of Greenwood, and his trade is not confined to the Village. His fame as a cord-winder is far spread.

There is a Tannery in the place, carried on by Mr. Wm. Pengelly.⁷ Business seems dull in his line just now, but he is said to do a fair amount during the year.

There is also that requisite of a prosperous Village, a blacksmith shop. It has changed occupants lately, having just been rented by the "Green estate" (owners), to Mr. Wm. Beaton, a son, (as I am informed) of Hector Beaton, Esq., late Pickering Township clerk, whose praise is in every mouth. If the son succeeds in winning a name as honored as his

father's, he will not have lived in vain.

Here, too, is to be found Mr. David Dunlop, long a representative man in agricultural implements. David is no man's fool. I find him to be a man of extensive reading, well up in popular authors, and almost as ready as our County Crown Attorney at quoting Shakespeare and the lesser poets.⁸



Croquet on the front lawn.

Frederick the Great wanted to build a palace at a distance from his capital, to which he might resort and forget for a time the cares of kingdom. A suitable site was selected, plans drawn and arrangements made for building, when the king discovered an obstacle in the shape of a mill, which the owner refused to sell even at a very high price. The king sent for the miller, and asked him why he was so obstinate. Because, said the miller, it was my father's mill, and there he lived and died, there, too, my son was born, and I will not sell it. I want to build my palace, says the king. Your majesty forgets that the mill is my palace. But don't you know, says Frederick, that I can take it whether you like it or not? No, said the miller, not while there are Judges at Berlin.

That mill was a wind mill, and likely stood on an elevated position to catch the breeze. Not so with the Greenwood mills, of which there are two, both in the glen, one a short distance north of the main road, and the other at a little greater distance down stream to the south.

The north, or upper mill, is a four-storey frame building, owned by the "Green estate," has 3 run of stones, machinery first class, all very complete, but under old process, has a capacity 80 barrels a day, is driven by water-power, and gives employment to about seven hands regularly in its different departments.

The south mill is owned by Frederick Green, Esq. It is a three-storey frame building, with 3 run of stones, is also driven by water power, machinery in good condition (old

WORLD'S FAIR AT CHICAGO

We want some of the crowd this way to buy goods.

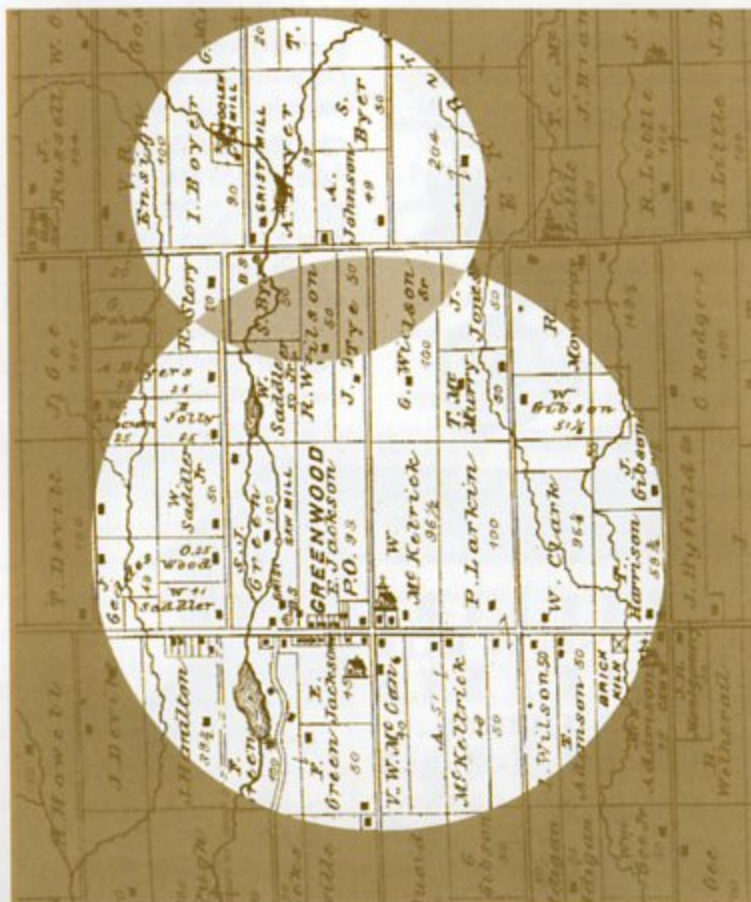
\$8000

worth to offer of Dry Goods, Groceries, Boots and Shoes, Hardware, Ready Made Clothing, Hats, Caps, Patent Medicines, Etc. Everything necessary to fill a first-class store. Call and examine stock. Space too small to give prices. All will be disposed of at almost living prices. Some less than cost, some at an advance of 5 per cent., some offered at more than an advance of 15 per cent. Average profit 10 per cent. No trouble to show goods. Give us a call we mean business. Highest prices for all kinds of produce

MOTTO—"Good goods, Small profits."

**M. GLEESON & SON,
GREENWOOD.**

process), capacity 50 barrels a day. Work done here is mainly custom work, run off about 200 bushels a day in gristing and chopping. I reached this mill by taking a short cut across the mill race, a very slippery operation which requires me to "walk circum-spectly" in the literal meaning of the expression. Both mills are leased and carried on by Mr. John Mitchell, a gen-



Portion of 1877 map showing Greenwood.

tleman of much energy and enterprise, who courteously responded to every enquiry. Mr. Mitchell buys considerable wheat at Uxbridge during the winter. Supplies for both mills are at present got from local sources. The upper mill is used for merchant work, and the lower one for custom work. Mr. Mitchell says Fall Wheat this year is a failure as compared with last year, the yield being little more than half. I learned from Frederick Green, Esq., of the very sudden death of his granddaughter, Miss Agnes Edith Meen, a few days before." The old gentleman spoke of the occurrence in such tender and loving words that they went straight to my heart. I must close here, as my letter is getting too long.

Traveller



Upper Mill, Greenwood

GREENWOOD MILL

By Lex Meunier

This item is from the Pickering News, 4 December 1885, p. 1. Ross Johnston, in the previous article, had referred to the Greenwood Mills as operating under the "old process." In 1885, however, the mill was remodelled according to the new standard. The News reported the progress: "We insert this week with a great deal of pleasure an account of the improvements made at the Greenwood mills, by our worthy citizen, Mr. John Mitchell. At great expense he has put in the roller process, so as to keep abreast of the times. This shows enterprise. The fact that all the largest mills in the township have introduced this new process within the past year or so speaks well for their owners, because these improvements have been made at a time when the milling business was suffering severely from unfair competition by those engaged in the trade across the lines. We trust Mr. Mitchell, as well as our other millers, will meet with great prosperity in future." For a history of the Greenwood Mills, see Mrs. Irvén McLean, Greenwood Through the Years, 1960, pp. 30-37.

The Greenwood Flouring Mills have been completely overhauled and remodeled to the full roller system, under the management of F.L. Green, with I. Courtenay as superintendent mill-wright.

After a great deal of work and an immense outlay to fit them up in such a manner as to render them one of the best mills in Canada, they have been started up again in a most satisfactory manner, reflecting great credit upon Mr. Courtenay for the way in which he performed his duty. They were first started up Wednesday, 18th ult. [18 November], and in three hours after first starting flour was sent to several to try its quality, and all pronounced it as excellent—the writer himself testifying as to the quality of the bread and cakes it made.

It may be of interest to describe the

mill and the various processes the wheat has to undergo before being ready for the baker: In the first place the mill is driven by a 14 inch [35 cm] "Little Giant" water-wheel, under the magnificent head of 36 feet [11 m], giving 54 horse-power.

The wheat after entering the mill and being weighed is elevated to the fifth floor, and is from there passed through a separator to take out all foreign material such as straws, chaff, &c. From this it goes to a smut machine, and is beaten and brushed to remove all smut and dust and remove the light wheat. It is now sent to a brush finishing and polishing machine, which ends the cleaning preliminary to grinding.

After leaving the Brush machine it is elevated to the stock hopper over the first rolls, and is sent from there through the break roll and merely

split through the crease in order to loosen all the crease dirt, which is taken out by passing through a scalper. After passing through the first scalper it is put successively through four more sets of rolls, each one reducing it finer, in the meantime being sent through a scalper after each roll, to separate the flour and middlings from the broken wheat. The flour and middlings from the scalper are collected and bolted to separate them, the flour going to the packer, the middlings to the purifiers. After being thoroughly purified they are ground on stones, except the coarsest, which are reduced on another sett of rolls; stones being generally accepted as the best for handling purified middlings. The patent flour comes from these last operations.

The light and branny particles which the purifiers "tail over" are sent to another sett of rolls. The flour, &c., is taken from one machine to another by means of elevators, conveyors, and spouts. There is almost a forest of spouts; so numerous that a stranger is almost in danger of being lost in the labyrinth.

The business is carried by Mr. John Mitchell, who expects to do a large business, and who has the well-known reputation of being a straightforward and in every way a successful business man. I have no doubt he will be pleased to show ladies or gentlemen the mysteries of flour-making, and the employees are noted for their civility to visitors and all.

The machinery was all supplied by the celebrated firm, E.P. Allis & Co., of Milwaukee, Wis., whose branch works are at Stratford. The machinery is such as to give a daily capacity of 90 bbls. [barrels].

**GREENWOOD
MILLS**

Are now running at full blast

I beg to inform my old friends and customers that
I am now prepared to buy

**ANY QUANTITY OF MECHANICAL
WHEAT.**

BEST GRADES OF FLOUR
Always on hand.

Also Bran, Shorts, and all kinds of
Mill Feed.

Flour exchanged for wheat.
of **JOHN MITCHELL.**

★ GREENWOOD ROLLER MILLS ★

F. L. GREEN, PROPRIETOR.

I have taken the above Mills, and will always keep Flour which cannot be best. Try it and you will say it is the best you ever used.

A specialty made of
Exchanging Flour for Wheat,
and am giving more Flour per Bushel than can be got elsewhere.

Bran and Shorts always on hand.

WHEAT WANTED!
Highest price paid for Wheat.

F. L. GREEN.

Notes

- George Burton kept the general store and post office in Green River from 1878 to 1888. He was the father of Charles Luther Burton, CEO of Simpson's Department Stores. See C.L. Burton, 1952. *A Sense of Urgency* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin).
- On Chapple see *Pathmaster* 5:3 & 4 (2003), p. 20
- On Poucher see *Pathmaster* 5:1 & 2 (2003), pp. 1-2.
- Concession 4, Lot 17.
- John Gerow ran the inn at Greenwood for several years before moving to Brougham in 1885, where he rented the Commercial House for a year, then purchased the Brougham Hotel from Thomas Poucher.
- The reference here is to William Carey (1761-1834), a once famous British missionary to India.
- William Pengelly is probably the son of John Pengelly, a tanner in Claremont. See the Tremaine map of 1860.
- The County Crown Attorney was John E. Farewell, L.L.B., K.C.
- Meen was probably the daughter of Fred Meen, Lot 12, Concession 5. The Beers Atlas (1877) Patron's Directory, p. 64, describes him as merchant, postmaster, and Divisional Court Clerk (the same positions held in 1883 by Gleeson—see above).



IN MEMORIAM

Edgerton Pegg



By Carol and John Sabeau

A note from the editor. The interview upon which this article is based was conducted in the spring of 1985 when we were the editors of the Pickering Naturalist. It was published in an earlier form in the June issue of that newsletter.

We offer it here, slightly revised, as a tribute to Edge who died this past summer.

Carol was one of the earliest members of the Pickering Naturalists and soon became a student of Edge's in the identification of wildflowers. I came along a couple of years later and began my own long association with Edge and Betty. I, too, learned to distinguish one wildflower from another, but never with Carol's confidence. On the other hand, I became fascinated by the history of botany in Canada, and devoted some time to the study of that discipline. Edge was always a fountain of knowledge on the pioneer uses of plants, on the naming of wildflowers, and on the local occurrences of rarities (see his discourse on the Osage Orange and Witches Broom below). In time I was conducting my own wildflower field trips. I often needed help in identifying plants, but I was then able to offer my own perspective on the history of those same plants in a Canadian context. Without Edge's great patience none of this would have occurred, and this part of my knowledge of pioneer life would never have developed. Republished with the permission of the Pickering Naturalists.

The house across the Seventh Concession Road from Claremont Conservation Area where Betty and Edge Pegg live is a mecca for naturalists from the Pickering area and increasingly so for birders from Toronto and further afield. Pickering Naturalist members have been to the home often to begin one of Edge's popular and well-conducted wildflower outings. They have also gathered there for the last few years to tally the results of the annual Christmas Bird Count. For those seeking winter finches what more could one ask than to view these birds—sometimes from mere inches away—through the windows of the Pegg's home.

This is Edge's territory. He was born just across the street—within view of the present house—in what is now the house of the assistant superintendent of the conservation area. The old farmstead where Edge and his four brothers and four sisters were raised became the nucleus of the present conservation area. After the Pegg children moved out onto their own farms the 60-hectare property was sold about 1960 to the Metropolitan

Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. They have since expanded it to its present 162 hectares which encompasses the whole block.

The homestead which Betty and Edge now occupy is an 18-hectare remnant of the 45-hectare mainly dairy farm that Edge used to operate. After Edge's retirement from farming they sold all but this small acreage which they have dubbed "Ponda Nesta." Here wildflowers and birds—and naturalists—are a major concern. The present house was planned by Betty and built from logs harvested on their own lot and sawn in Tyrone at the old mill.

Edge is modest about his knowledge of wildlife, but his knowledge—largely self-taught—is deep and his enthusiasm boundless. But it was not always so. He says his mother proba-

bly started it all when she had him put out a bird feeder in the winter of 1929. "I thought that was kind of stupid," he admits now. That first year the feeder was visited by two Gray Jays, but unaware of the significance of this he remained unimpressed. Nevertheless, he continued to put out food for the birds for the next several years. Then he drifted away from it, becoming more interested in other activities.



Edgerton Pegg, c1940.

Farming, of course, occupied much of his time. But he enjoyed sports as well. He played baseball and hockey in the local township leagues. He says that in those days he had to pay 25¢ to get into the park in order to play ball. Often they would play double-headers, which might not end until midnight. When the games were over he would have to hurry home to milk

the cows and complete his other chores. In spite of this he continued to play both baseball and hockey past the age of 40.

As if these activities were not enough, Edge, along with Betty and their two children, Kathy and Hal, formed a musical troupe that played at church garden parties around the countryside. Betty played the piano, Edge the banjo, the ukulele, the xylophone and even a musical saw. They presented Western and hillbilly shows which Betty wrote and directed. This continued for years until the children grew up. Looking back on it now Edge confesses he doesn't know how they managed it all.

Meanwhile, during the 1950s, Edge got back into feeding the birds again. For this he credits Pat Kingstone. Pat pointed out a Field Sparrow that Edge could not identify without the aid of a field guide. This aroused his curiosity. He began to pay more attention to the birds attracted to the feeder. In 1961, he and Betty joined the Durham Region Field Naturalists. Edge paid close attention during walks with this club and learned a lot from the association with other

members. Eventually his observations led him to write wildlife articles for the *Ajax Advertiser* when B.D. Lawrence was its editor.

Betty was originally from Toronto. How does a city girl fare surrounded by wildlife on the farm? Very well, thank you. When one encounters Betty and Edge bird watching in the field you see Edge with binoculars around his neck but Betty is toting a camera and sometimes a lot of heavy photographic equipment. She is a superb photographer. Even as a child she had a box camera. In high school she belonged to the camera club and learned to develop her own film. Her mother before her was also a photographer. "Mother never had her picture taken," Betty says, "because she was always behind the camera; I'm exactly the same."

Betty used to take wedding pictures. Then Edge suggested she try nature photography. She has never looked back. She has had many of her photographs enlarged and either hung on their wall or sold (or given away as presents). She once took a framing course and now does her own picture framing. She also makes buttons out of some of her photos. Last year she submitted some photos to the Markham Fair for judging. She

received prizes in three areas including first prize in the seniors' class.

In recent years Betty has had a lot of opportunity to use her camera. She and Edge now travel widely to observe nature. Their first birding trip was in 1968 to Bonaventure Island. Since then they have been across Canada twice, to Alaska and the Pribilof Islands, to Churchill, to Texas (three times), to Arizona (twice), to California, to Florida and even to Scotland in 1983.

During the years when Edge was farming Betty was teaching school along with raising her family. In the beginning she taught music then took time out to have her two children. When she went back it was to teach kindergarten at West Rouge. Now she has retired from teaching after twenty-two years. But Betty, like her husband, never seems to slow down.

Her retirement gave her the opportunity to learn a craft she had always held an interest in—weaving. She has taken courses, joined a guild and has developed into a creative and talented weaver. Now this craft competes with photography for her attention.

She also continues the music tradition in the family. She is organist at the Greenwood United Church. She is also active as a member of that

church in other capacities such as serving as president of the United Church Women's group.

Both Betty and Edge are collectors. They enjoy wildlife art and display a number of prints of such well-known artists as Robert Bateman and Marc Barrie, both of whom they number among their friends. They have exceptional collections of barbed wire, automobile licence plates, maple sap spigots, bottles and jugs among other things.

Edge and Betty were among the founders of the Pickering Naturalists. We value greatly the contributions they have made to our club. They have also made valuable contributions to the interest in, and preservation of, wildlife in the whole Pickering area. They have taught about wildlife in the schools and in the field. They have encouraged many to join naturalist clubs. And Edge's journals, which record the wildlife of the Claremont area over many years, will stand as an important documentation for future generations.

Note:

1 Edge and Betty have appeared several times in *Pathmaster*. See 1(1): 4; 1(4): 32-33; 3(3&4): 26-27.

ADDITIONAL NOTE from the editor—2004:

I credit Edge for arousing my interest in Pickering's history. He became a mentor for me in many ways—in identifying wildlife, in researching pioneer history, and in living a full life in general. His stories about the Pegg family, his collections of pioneer artifacts, his models of fence types, and his documenting of area wildlife all encouraged my probing even deeper into other aspects of our past. Edge was a man I much admired and from whom I learned a great deal!



Edge building his home on the Seventh Concession Road, 1946.



Home of Andrew and Essie Pegg and family, c1954. The house is now occupied by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

OSAGE ORANGES AND WITCHES BROOMS

By Edge and Betty Pegg

The Osage Orange

Many years ago, Osage Orange Trees were planted south of Concession Five, along Sideline 16, in Pickering. It is a mystery how they grew there, since they rarely survive a severe frost. They are native to Texas and Arkansas, home of the Osage Indians. Having many thorny branches, they were planted as living fences, before barbed wire was invented around 1872. The wood was used in making bows; the boiled chips yielded a yellow dye.

Flowering in June, Osage Orange trees have green, wrinkled grapefruit-sized fruit by October. The orange is not edible for humans, but is full of seeds favoured by Cardinals and many other seed-eating birds.

Witches Broom

I have seen a number of Witches Brooms in the Durham Region, and am surprised that many people to whom I have spoken have never seen one and the few that have, have no idea of what causes them. I overheard a man, who

was looking at one, tell his son, "That's an Eagle's nest."

A Witches Broom may be started by some irritant such as a fungus, but in most cases by a parasitic plant known as Dwarf Mistletoe. The seed of this plant is likely carried to the tree by a bird. It sends a penetrating root into the living layers of the host, which, over the years, grows around it, sending out many parallel broom-like side suckers. They are most frequently found in Spruce or Pine trees. There are two along the Seventh Concession in Pickering in Spruce trees. The one high in a tree just west of Brock Road is two and a half metres in width — the largest I have seen.

Plant breeders have propagated Witches Brooms by grafting. Many of our dwarf evergreens came from them originally. Medical researchers working on cancer have studied Witches Broom and other similar growths on plants for any clue these may shed on unusual production rates of cellular materials.



Witches Broom on the Seventh Concession Road

AN AMUSING EPISODE

Pickering News 12 May 1893, p. 8

An amusing little episode is reported by the teacher of Greenwood's public school. A few days ago two little fellows—twins—started to school for the first time. Upon presenting themselves the teacher asked the first little fellow his name, to which the child answered Tom. His instructor informed him that he should say Thomas, as Tom was not a proper name. The second boy was paying strict attention to this conversation, and when asked for his name promptly replied Jackass. He was generally called Jack, but in this instance was anxious to make no mistakes. This story is vouched for by the teacher.

[Editor's note: The teacher in question was W.J. Marquis. I haven't yet identified the twins.]

A WONDERFUL FISH!

They tell of a singular thing that happened at Greenwood lake the other day. The little son of Mr. Wisbboon, seven years of age—the son, not the old man—had been in the habit of feeding the pickeral that abound in the lake, especially one of enormous size. One day the little fellow, while engaged at this from a boat in front of his father's residence, fell overboard, and this identical pickeral, with a memory of the past worthy of all praise, swam to the boy, took the lappel of his jacket tenderly in his mouth, and swam with him to the shore. Then seeing that the lad was unconscious it ran up to the house and brought the family down. It waited only long enough to see the boy resuscitated, and then struck across the intervening country for Pickering, and is now on exhibition at Greig's tailor shop. Call and see it.

J. GREIG,

TAILOR.

THE HERMIT OF BROUGHAM

Pickering News 14 October 1892, p. 4

Miss Hinch, a mysterious resident of this place was conveyed to her last resting place on Monday afternoon. She has been a sufferer from lung trouble for some months, and on Sunday morning died. Although Miss Hinch has been a resident of this village for a number of years past, but few of us have seen her and no one was intimate with her. In short she lived the life of a hermit. Nothing is known of her relatives, she emphatically refusing to speak of her life previous to coming here.

During the last few weeks of her life, she admitted Mrs. John Cowan to her humble abode, and that lady nursed her with the utmost care and attention. The deceased lady had money besides the dwelling, which she occupied but nothing is yet known as to how she disposed of her property. In her death the mystery that surrounds her career is rendered all the more obscure. The funeral on Tuesday was largely attended by our villagers, and Rev. L. Perrin conducted the services in connection therewith.

ENLARGING THE SEVENTH CONCESSION ROAD IMPROVEMENT OR DESECRATION?

by Milton N. Pegg

Originally published as "Past memories remain despite men and machines," *Stouffville Tribune* 28 August 1969.

There has been a great commotion going on this summer up on the seventh concession of Pickering north of Greenwood and west to the Brock road. There were violent explosions making nearby houses tremble as the cement bridge over Duffin's Creek was blown to pieces. There was the snorting and clattering of bulldozers, the rumbling of great earth movers and adding to the din, the moving in and out of trucks and big cement mixers. Rasping chain-saws cut down trees great and small, while powerful machines dug out the stumps and loaded and removed them. Wire fences, rail fences, and stone fences were removed. The road allowance has been almost doubled in width and new steel fences and gates erected.

Old timers who have used this road for over half a century see these changes with a nostalgia tinged with sadness as its whole appearance is being changed. Much of this road was lined with fine old maple and elm trees. As one passed eastward from the Brock road and descended the three hills to the bottom of the valley of Duffins Creek, a fine view was to be seen from the top of each hill. Many of the trees are now gone, the hills cut down and the valleys filled. Near the old bridge at Duffins Creek where the branches of the trees almost met overhead the scene was one of idyllic pastoral charm. From the north came the clear sparkling water to flow under the bridge. Here many a fine trout was lifted from the shadowy depths and here many a farmer's

lad came for a cooling dip on a hot summers day. The songs of the woodthrush, robin and many others

and wagons to be ground into meal for their livestock. East of the bridge was the crossing place for the birds

the creatures of the wild will willingly cross over this new wide highway.

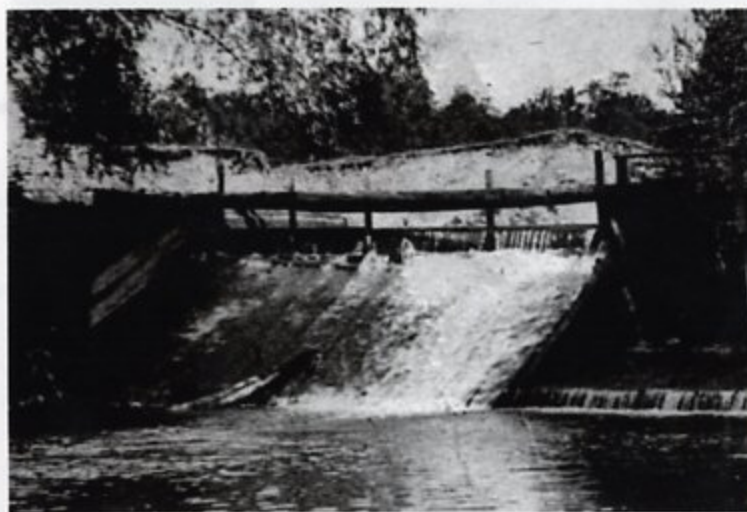
Viewing this area recently, the writer and his son Edward saw where a bulldozer had made a few passes over the site of George Graham's old blacksmith shop which over a century ago stood at the top of the hill, west of the bridge. A few minutes search revealed many artifacts including blacksmith-made bolts, hinges, links of logging chains, an iron wedge, pieces of horse shoes, a front caulk for a horse shoe, horse shoe nails, a broken file made into a chisel, a nut with a handle used to tighten wagon box end rods, clinkers and bits of coal from the forge, and most nostalgic of all the porcelain arm and part of the head of a doll that probably belonged to one of George Graham's little daughters.¹

As one thinks back it is hard to realize that in a place of such quiet charm and beauty there have been grim tragedies. At the old bridge, and near to it, five persons met sudden and violent death. One evening about a hundred years ago Mrs. Graham was milking the family cow, when their dog which had been tormented by some boys at the blacksmith shop, rushed to her side for comfort and protection. The cow turned and lunged at the dog and one of the cow's horns entered Mrs. Graham's eye and pierced her brain. Six children were left motherless. Later George married again and had ten more children making a family of sixteen children raised.

On a cold January morning in 1904



The Seventh Concession Road under construction, 1969.



Bayles Dam, 1916

could be heard from the dense woods to the south. To the north until recently stood the old Boyer mill belonging to the late John Bayles, mute reminder of the days when the farmers hauled their grain with hors-

and animals of the forest as they clung to the sanctuary of the bottomland woods. Squirrels, rabbits, foxes, partridge, wild turkeys and deer have been seen to pass over the old road here. It is hardly to be expected that

Stouffville Tribune 28 August 1969. Photograph by Henry Hempele.

Courtesy of Betty Pegg



Pegg boys—probably Milton, Lloyd and Will—skinny dipping at Bayles Dam, July 1916.

Abe Boyer, who was 69 years old, was working alone in the mill. The heavy coat he wore caught in a projecting key on a heavy steel shaft. He was thrown violently around striking his head on a beam. His body fell into the open millrace below and was not discovered until several hours later by his anxious wife and neighbors.

In 1905 Thomas Bayles, a brother-in-law to Abe Boyer took over the mill. In 1907 he too was accidentally killed while moving a pile driver up to the dam to do repair work.

Just before the outbreak of the Second World War, two young lads who lived in Brooklin, Jack Maynard and Bill Cassidy, had tinkered with an old Chrysler car, stripping it down to the chassis, with only the motor, front seat and a box on the rear for ballast remaining. One evening with the joyous exhilaration of youth, they sped westward along the seventh concessions of Whitby and Pickering townships, with open muffler, travelling at a high speed. Several persons heard the noise as of an aeroplane passing. As they neared the bridge over Duffins Creek, owing to some loose gravel on the road, the machine went out of control, going into the

north ditch and turning over. The cedar tree on the north side of the Bridge bore the scar from the impact until it was cut down this year. Eight young men were instantly killed and the water flowed red under the bridge.

It is true of almost every locality where human beings have travelled or lived that there have been tragedies. Some are recorded, many are soon forgotten. And so, as we reminisce, some of us older folks wonder why this road should be widened, levelled and paved at an expense of hundreds of thousands of dollars to make more speedway into this quiet place, which to those who have lived here since childhood, is one of the fairest and loveliest places on earth. Are the powers that be defeating their own purpose? We wonder.

Note:

- 1 George Graham was formerly a blacksmith in Claremont. See Traveller in *Whitby Chronicle*, 14 November 1884. The shop near Greenwood is indicated in the Beers Atlas of 1877 on Lot 12, Concession 6.



British Arms Hotel as it looks in recent years.

BRITISH ARMS HOTEL, GREENWOOD

From *Tavern in the Town: Early Inns and Taverns of Ontario*, by Margaret McBurney and Mary Byers (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987, p. 118)

[I]n the appealing village of Greenwood, the British Arms Hotel was by 1870 one of two hostelries serving a population of about five hundred people. This establishment's grandiloquent name was belied by its modest appearance, for it is a simple frame structure, set a few steps back from the main street. At the west end of the building a separate door led into the taproom. The British Arms boasted a spring in the basement. Water was piped to a trough at the front, where horses were watered. Perhaps, on occasion, patrons inside drank the water as well, sometimes to their sorrow. One newspaper of the day reported the death of a man whose demise was the direct result of "drinking cold water in a tavern."

CRIMES OF A CENTURY: THE ALGER CASE

by John W. Sabean

In Victorian times there were some notable criminal cases involving Pickering Township people. Since none of these made the history books they are now all but forgotten. They are, however, very much a part of our history and serve as a reminder to us that "the good old days" were not as benign as we sometimes portray them.

This is the first in a planned series of articles about sensational crimes in nineteenth-century Pickering.

On a cloudy Tuesday afternoon in September 1895, six men gathered at the Christian Cemetery in Brougham where for the first time in Pickering's history they exhumed a body for the purpose of investigating an alleged crime.¹ The body was that of Mary Ellen Hubbard, wife of George Elisha Alger.

The exhumation was made at the behest of the Equitable Life Insurance Company and the Home Life Association who had strong evidence that a fraud was being perpetrated against them. A year previous to Mrs. Alger's death Equitable had issued a \$10,000 policy on her life, and on 11 July an additional \$5000 policy was applied for with Home Life, but Mrs. Alger died before the application could be properly filed.

While several people were suspected of participation in the alleged fraud, the primary suspicion fell on the husband. To protect his interest, Alger hired the law firm of Macdonald and Fitch of Stouffville. Macdonald and Fitch were also present at the exhumation and did everything in their power to prevent it. Having failed that they insisted that doctors of their choice be admitted to the post mortem. When interviewed by the press Mr. Fitch firmly stated: "Mr. Alger is a perfectly innocent man and this action of the authorities to-day in dragging the body of his wife out of the grave we consider a scandal and an injustice to him." On the other hand he admitted that there was "undoubtedly a conspiracy to defraud the insurance company, but the client had no knowledge of it."²

The post mortem examination proved that Mrs. Alger died of pulmonary tuberculosis, or as it was then called, consumption. The fraud claim



The site of the Alger exhumation. The large stone is the Hubbard memorial, which contains the inscription to Mary Ellen (Hubbard) Alger.

hinged on who knew that she suffered from this dread disease and when they knew it.

We know very little about the Alger family. Mary was a member of one of the oldest families in Pickering Township, but George was a relative newcomer. They lived in the Sixth Concession of Pickering Township, somewhere to the west of Brougham. They had five children. In late July, Mrs. Alger left

with her mother and two sons to visit friends in Belleville. She was plan-

ning to stay for two weeks, but died on the 12th of August before she could return. She was 41 years of age.³



Inscription carved into the Hubbard memorial stone.

The *Pickering News* stated on the 16th of August that Mrs. Alger's death came as a surprise to everyone. While she had "not been entirely robust for some months ... [she was still] able to attend to her household duties." While down east she took suddenly ill and her husband was summoned. He stayed about a week, but assured by the attending doctor that there was no

danger, he returned home to look after business. No sooner had he arrived home, however, than he received a telegram stating that his wife was dying, and by the time he arrived back in Belleville she had passed away. According to the *News* the funeral was a large one.

In the month that followed, the insurance company that held the policy on Mrs. Alger's life began to get wind that not everything was above board in the application for insurance. An agent named Salls, who does not otherwise figure in the subsequent events, had the matter investigated. In the course of that investigation the actions of Dr. Charles Henry Francey, of Whitevale, in supporting insurance applications came into question.

The insurance company thereupon reexamined all those policies in which Dr. Francey had been the examining physician, and cancelled a number of them. Dr. Francey, fearing the scandal that was bound to erupt, ran off to Buffalo, New York. In the meantime the legal process was initiated that led to the exhumation.

A preliminary hearing of the case against George Alger was held on 8 November at the Ontario County Courthouse in Whitby before Police Magistrate Harper.⁴ The prosecutor was J.E. Farewell, Q.C., Ontario County's Crown Attorney. Alger was represented by T.H. Lennox, of Newmarket, and S.A. Jones, of Toronto. By this time Dr. Francey had returned to Canada having secured immunity from prosecution presumably for his promise to testify against Alger. After hearing testimony from several witnesses the magistrate committed Alger for trial on a charge of having conspired with Dr.

Photograph by John W. Sabean

Photograph by John W. Sabean

Francey to defraud the Equitable Insurance Company.

In a related hearing, Alger, Francey, and two insurance company employees were charged with conspiring to defraud the Home Life Insurance Company. The result of this hearing was that Alger and the two insurance agents were to stand trial in December.

For reasons not recorded in the *Pickering News* the Grand Jury trial, presided over by Mr. Justice Falconbridge, did not occur until March 1896.⁵ When it finally got under way the two insurance agents were dismissed and Alger alone was left to face the charges. Farewell was again the prosecutor, but the defense was conducted by R.C. Clute, Q.C. After all the witnesses had testified the judge made his charge to the jury concluding with the comment that "the charge was strongly against the prisoner." The jury took about an hour and a half to deliberate and returned a verdict of guilty. His Lordship then thanked the jury for their "just" decision and then pronounced sentence upon the prisoner. "Seven years in the Provincial Penitentiary at Kingston," intoned the judge to a stunned courtroom.

Was justice, indeed, served? Was Alger the chief conspirator, or even a party to the conspiracy at all? Even if guilty was the sentence appropriate? The *Pickering News* answered in the negative and I am inclined to agree for the most part. But *you* be the judge.

Here are the facts in the case as they were elaborated in the various trials. The conspiracy began, it would appear, when Henry Trull, an Oshawa agent for the Equitable Insurance Company, visited Whitevale and asked Dr. Francey for

his assistance in finding people who might wish to purchase life insurance. For his efforts Dr. Francey was to get 25% of the premiums.⁶

One of the farms the two visited was that of George Alger. Francey was not expecting a favourable reception because Alger had previously indicated a "prejudice against insurance," and, indeed, on this occasion Alger told them he was too busy to discuss the issue. Francey claimed that Alger later came to see him about taking out an insurance policy on his wife. Francey's response was that Alger's wife's condition was such that she was not an acceptable risk. After an examination he had determined that Mrs. Alger was suffering from consumption and this he said he reported to Alger.⁷

Having told Alger that his wife was probably not insurable, Francey went on to say that if they could pass her, a policy on Mrs. Alger's life could prove profitable for both he and Alger. Alger suggested they put through a policy for \$5000, of which Francey would get \$1000 after Mrs. Alger's death. Francey testified that he suggested Equitable because if Mrs. Alger lived for more than a year the policy would be incontestable. In saying this he "knew that they had committed a fraudulent Act," and told Alger that if any questions arose about the policy no claims should be pressed.

With this agreement in hand Francey went to see Trull to get the necessary forms. Francey testified that the "replies made to the questions in the medical report were in most cases

false." He said that Mrs. Alger was not a party to the fraud, but that Alger himself "was thoroughly aware of it." In the course of preparing the application Francey upped the ante to \$7000, of which he would carry the extra \$2000 himself and pay the premiums on that portion. In order to divert suspicion, a policy on Alger's life was also applied for, but it was rejected.

At a later time, Dr. Francey, finding himself in the Toronto office of the insurance company, took a medical certificate blank and filled it out—making application for a further \$5000 policy on Mrs. Alger from Home Life.⁸ Knowing that Mrs. Alger by this time refused to have anything to do with insurance, Francey had her signature forged.⁹

Somehow, after Mrs. Alger died, the *Toronto World* learned of the second policy and published an article questioning its legitimacy. In response to this Francey went to see Alger's bank manager and then his lawyers, MacDonald and Fitch. At first he denied doing anything wrong, but eventually he admitted the whole scheme, including the forgery. He wanted Alger and the lawyers to back out of the deal believing that the insurance company would then have no further interest.

The lawyers told Francey that Alger had not been part of the deal in the first place and that they were prepared to press the claim. Francey then "begged them not to take any legal proceedings, and asked if they did that he be given a month to enable him to dispose of his practice and leave." Fearing that he would be caught in the middle of a scandal

Francey then fled to Buffalo and there waited "till Alger should come to his

senses and give up all claims." When he did return it was under a safe-conduct, but who had granted it to him he would not reveal and the judge allowed him to demur.

In giving his testimony both at the preliminary hearing and at the trial, Dr. Francey revealed how deeply he was involved in the conspiracy. He had lied about Mrs. Alger's condition, he had falsified his medical report on the application, he had had Mrs. Alger's name forged on the second application, he erased from his account books any entries that might incriminate him, and he fled the country when reports of a possible scandal began to circulate. But with regard to the conspiracy to fraud he insisted he was not acting alone.

Dr. William E. Eastwood, of Claremont, was another witness in the case. His testimony in part substantiated Dr. Francey and in part incriminated him. He said that as early as the summer of 1888 he had diagnosed consumption in the deceased and had told her husband and several of her relatives of her condition. In 1894, Dr. Eastwood was approached by the defendant to support an insurance policy he wanted to take out on his wife. Alger told him that Dr. Francey had already approved the policy. Dr. Eastwood, not wanting to offend the family agreed to recommend Mrs. Alger as a risk in the application, but at the same time he notified the company that he was rejecting her. Dr. Eastwood also testified that Dr. Francey had falsified information about Mrs. Alger's physical condition, and that Alger had asked him (Dr. Eastwood) to claim she died of pneumonia if she died before the full year necessary to substantiate the policy. While Dr. Eastwood does not seem to have been



Ontario County Court House, c1895.

a party to the fraud conspiracy, it strikes me that he could have saved Alger from later grief had he been more honest and forthright with him.

Dr. John Ferguson, of Toronto, who had conducted the post-mortem after the exhumation, gave testimony as to his findings in his examination. He said that beyond any doubt death was due to tubercular consumption. He was then asked if, in his opinion, Dr. Eastwood had acted properly. He responded that he "thought that the course of Dr. Eastwood was perfectly justifiable under the circumstances in which he found himself."¹

When the defense was mounted at the trial in March 1896, George Alger was called as the first witness. Essentially he denied knowing that his wife suffered from consumption—thereby contradicting the testimony of both Dr. Francey and Dr. Eastwood. He also denied that he was part of a conspiracy to fraud the insurance company or that he even knew about the forged second application to Home Life. He adamantly insisted, in response to Farewell's questioning, that "in his mind ... his wife was in good health until a very short time before her death."

Testifying on Alger's behalf were a number of his neighbours and relatives.² All of them swore on oath that they were unaware that Mrs. Alger suffered ill health until the Spring of 1895, in fact, several declared that she was still cleaning house until May of that year. Nellie Alger, the 18-year-old daughter of the accused and Mrs. Alger, not only agreed with the above testimony, but also declared that she was present when her mother had been examined in May by Dr. Francey. Francey, she said, told her mother that her lungs "were weak but not affected, and if she took care of herself for a year or two she would be all right."

As difficult as it is to unravel the truth at the time a crime is committed it is even harder looking back after 100 years and the only source is newspaper accounts of the trial.

Nevertheless, there are a number of circumstances that seem to point to Alger's innocence. Not only did his neighbours and relatives testify that Mrs. Alger remained active until just

a few months before her death, but even the *Pickering News'* gossip columns—before the exhumation took place—made reference to her fulfilling her household duties.³

Although both Dr. Francey and Dr. Eastwood testified that they had told Alger his wife suffered from consumption, Francey later admitted that he had not recently communicated that information to Alger. And even if they had told him that his wife had consumption he may not have realized the gravity of the condition, especially since Francey himself said she should recover.

There is no evidence, apart from Francey's implication, that Alger intended fraud when he sought to take out insurance on his wife. He seems to have believed that she would still live for many years. As to the second application—the one completed in July 1895—there is just as much reason to believe that Alger was unaware of its existence as there is to believe that he conspired with Dr. Francey to falsify the information. It was, after all, Francey who filled out the form (falsely), had the signature forged, and submitted it to an insurance agent (who made no attempt to verify the information).

And finally, had Alger known the applications were fraudulent, would he have been so insistent upon making a claim on them after his wife's death, especially after Dr. Francey admitted to his lawyers that the applications were full of lies and that one was even forged. Only someone who believed he was acting in good faith would still want to proceed at that stage.

The editor of the *Pickering News*, much closer to the affair than we are today, emphatically sided with Alger, and argued that Dr. Francey was the one who should be on trial. The *News* published an editorial on the 15th of November 1895, just as the second day of the preliminary hearing was getting underway. On day one of the proceedings most of the weight of the testimony was directed against the defendant George Alger, but the *News*—while not able to comment on Alger's complicity because the case was still being heard—felt obliged to comment on the role that Dr. Francey

played. Because Francey, on his own testimony, was guilty of insurance fraud in this one case, all of those policies in which he had been the medical examiner were now open to question, and the *Toronto World* "officially and officiously announced," as the *News* put it, that "proceedings will be taken against other prominent residents of Pickering."

Whatever role others may have played in the insurance fraud, the *News* proclaimed, the prime offender was Dr. Charles Henry Francey. "When one is examined for life insurance, the doctor is all-powerful.... No corruption, no swindle or any diversions can be put through without



Corner stone from the Christian Church, which formerly stood on the cemetery grounds.

the connivance of a swindler physician." The *News* was very harsh with Dr. Francey. He was "from the first the living principle of whatever conspiracy or organized swindling may be discovered in this district.... He alone had so bad a conscience that he fled the country." He admitted lying about Mrs. Alger's condition, that he was to share in the plunder, and that the application he prepared could not have been more dishonest. The *News* concludes: "Dr. Francey may enjoy immunity from prosecution but he has not been granted the respect of honest men. He has forfeited that more completely than any other man connected with these cases, for, be he the arch-conspirator or not, he was, by training and education in a learn[ed]-profession, more responsible morally than any of his clients or patients." The *News* did not buy Dr. Francey's claim that he had been led astray by Alger.

When the trial was over and the sentence read out, the *Pickering News* did not try to second guess the jury's decision of guilt, but it did question the severity of the punishment. It

predicted that attempts would be made to shorten the term.⁴ Indeed, a petition for early release began as early as the following October.⁵ In the end Alger served 19 months in the Kingston Penitentiary before being released in November 1897. The *News* commented: "The seven year sentence was, when imposed, considered out of all proportion to the charge, and his liberation is generally conceded to be proper at this early date."⁶ Not all agreed, however; some Toronto papers groused about the early release, but the *News* made this rejoinder: "Only those who live in Pickering township know how complete and sufficient a punishment it is to be sent elsewhere for nineteen months."⁷

At this point in time we have no knowledge of what happened to Alger and his family after his release.

Notes

- 1 The date of the exhumation was 15 September 1895. The six men were: Detective John Murray, Dr. John Ferguson, and Dr. George A. Bingham, of Toronto; Ontario County Crown Attorney J.E. Farewell and High Constable Calverly of Whitby; and Mr. Hiltz, Pickering Village's undertaker. See *Pickering News* [PN] 13 September 1895.
- 2 PN 13 September 1895.
- 3 PN 26 July & 16 August 1895.
- 4 The preliminary hearing was reported in PN 15 & 22 November 1895.
- 5 The trial was reported in PN 10 & 27 March 1896.
- 6 This was the amount as stated in the preliminary hearing. At the Grand Jury trial Dr. Francey claimed it was only 20%.
- 7 This occurred in December 1894.
- 8 This was in July 1895.
- 9 The forger was the wife of insurance agent N.C. Brown. On Dr. Francey see the brief note in T.E. Kaiser (ed.), 1934. *A History of the Medical Profession of the County of Ontario*. Oshawa: Mundy-Goodfellow Printing Co., p. 112.
- 10 This was also the opinion of B. Hal Brown of the London and Lancashire Insurance Co.
- 11 They included neighbours Daniel Forryth, Isaac Littlejohn, Alice Connor, Alpheus Hoover, William Hagerman, Charles Brodie and Alexander Burrell; Dr. H.H. Alger (defendant's brother), Mary Hubbard (defendant's mother-in-law), and Nellie Alger (defendant's daughter).
- 12 PN 26 July & 16 August 1895.
- 13 PN 27 March 1896.
- 14 PN 23 October 1896; 14 May 1897.
- 15 PN 12 November 1897.
- 16 PN 19 November 1897.

I had finished writing the previous account of the Alger case when Allan McGillivray the curator of the Uxbridge-Scott Museum introduced me to the life of detective John Wilson Murray. Murray (1840-1906) was the first detective to be appointed by the Province of Ontario, and from 1875 until his death in 1906 he was the most famous policeman in Canada. His editor wrote of him: "A tireless investigator who never gave up on a case, Murray was far ahead of his time in scientific criminal detection. He was one of the first detectives in the world to realize the importance of footprints; to regularly have an autopsy performed on murder victims; and to regularly have clothing and murder weapons chemically tested for signs of



John Wilson Murray, *Memoirs of a Great Canadian Detective* (1977), frontispiece.

blood or hair or any other clue they might contain. He spent hours reconstructing the crime, and in checking and cross-checking alibis and motives. These

procedures, common now, were a revelation in their day."

Murray's *Memoirs* were published in 1904. They were written partly in first person when Murray was narrating, and partly in third person when his editor, Victor Speer, was adding his commentary. The Toronto publishing firm, Collins, later republished the *Memoirs* in two volumes in 1977 and 1980.

Twice in these *Memoirs* Murray was called to Pickering Township to solve crimes and bring the perpetrators to justice. One case involved a violent rape and murder in Brougham—we will write about this case in a future issue. The other was the Alger fraud case. As we have said above we believe in this instance Murray went after the wrong man. However, the outcome for Murray

was successful in that the attempted fraud of insurance companies was thwarted. It is obvious, however, that George Alger was not the mastermind of a grand conspiracy in the township. Dr. Francey, on the other hand, who may have had a part in several fraud attempts, was free to carry his misdeeds to another location.

We reproduce below Murray's own account of the Alger case side-by-side with the full text of the commentary by the editor of the *Pickering News* on the comparative roles of George Alger and Dr. Charles Francey.

Note:

1 John Wilson Murray, *Memoirs of a Great Canadian Detective* (Toronto: Collins, 1977), p. ix.

GEORGE ALGER'S GRAVEYARD POLICY

From John Wilson Murray, *Memoirs of a Great Canadian Detective: Incidents in the Life of John Wilson Murray* (Toronto: Collins, 1977), pp. 187-189.

Graveyard insurance is as old as the insurance of life itself. On a small scale it is practised year after year with varying degrees of success. Occasionally a big raid is planned on the insurance companies; but the larger the amount involved, the less apt the plan is to work out. In Canada, however, in the year 1895, a scheme to mulct the insurance companies out of many thousands of dollars was engineered and was beginning to materialise, when it was detected and broken up. A number of persons doomed to die were insured by fraud and misrepresentation, through a conspiracy involving agents of some companies.

"The case that brought the whole conspiracy to collapse was located in the township of Pickering, in the county of Ontario, ten miles from Whitby, the county seat," says Murray. "A farmer, named George Alger, and his wife lived there on a fine, big farm. Mrs. Alger was a delicate woman. In the same neighbourhood lived Dr. Charles Henry Francey, who was medical examiner for a number of insurance companies, one of them being the Equitable. In 1894 Alger and Dr. Francey effected an insurance on the life of Mrs. Alger in the Equitable for \$7,000, and on July 11th of the next year application was made for \$5,000 in the Home Life. The application was approved, as it was regular and favourable, owing to the conspiracy. Before the policy could arrive Mrs. Alger was dead. She died on August 13th, 1895, and, while she lay in her coffin in the parlour, the \$5,000 policy on her life came to her husband.

"Alger set out to collect the insurance. An action was begun, and finally came to trial in Toronto. In the meantime the Home Life policy, so closely connected

with her death, led to an investigation. I had the body of Mrs. Alger exhumed in Brougham cemetery, and had it examined by Dr. Ferguson and Dr. Bingham. They found death had been due to consumption. She had been ill for several years I learned from others. Alger went on the stand in the trial in Toronto, and gave evidence clearly contrary to the facts. I was satisfied there was a conspiracy afoot. I arrested him and took him to Whitby, where he was committed for trial for conspiracy. Dr. Francey, who had acted in the dual capacity of medical examiner for the insurance companies and Alger's physician, had left the country. He went to Buffalo. After staying there some time I located him and saw him, and he was persuaded to return and give evidence under the protection of the Crown. When this had been accomplished, it simplified the whole matter. We needed Francey to prove other cases.

"We showed at the trial of Alger that Dr. Eastwood, in 1888, had examined Mrs. Alger, and had told Alger that his wife had consumption and would die in a few years, if she did not have a change of climate. The years passed. Mrs. Alger grew worse. Her husband sat by as she coughed her life away, and as the end drew near took out insurance by fraud and then waited for her to die. It must have been a pleasant household where this weak woman sat suffocating day after day, each day being harder than the day before, while the man with the big farm and perfect health sat quietly by, waiting for her to smother to death so that he could grow richer by her dying! His so-called friend came and went, but the woman was left to die. Instead of sending her to the mountains or to California to live, as he could have done, he speculated on her death, cheating her in her life and endeavouring to cheat the companies by her death. But, by the irony of fate, after lingering so many suffering years, she died too soon. She was very patient

and brave during her agony and endeavoured to make her husband as little trouble as possible. She never knew of his villainy.

"Alger was tried in March 1896, and was convicted and sent to Kingston for seven years. Dr. Francey not only testified against Alger and revealed the entire dastardly plot, but admitted his own part in it and acknowledged he was a rascal. He confessed also that he had acted with equal dishonesty in a number of other instances. There was considerable excitement over the revelations.

"The result was a wholesale overhauling of a number of policies. The Equitable cancelled two policies on the life of A.E. Thornton of Whitevale; a policy on the life of Donald Beaton, a policy on the life of J.H. Besse, and a policy on the life of James Sadler, of Greenwood. Other companies cancelled other policies and the conspiracy collapsed.

"Nicholas L. Brown, an Ontario agent of the Home Life, came to me and told me how he got into it. He got off. Joseph Hortop, agent for the Ontario Mutual Association, also got off. In the trial of the case, Crown Attorney Farewell prosecuted, while Alger was represented by G. Smith Macdonald, T. Herbert Lennox, C. Russell Fitch, and S. Alfred Jones. The case marked the end in any concerted efforts in the Province to mulct the insurance companies on an extensive scale. Alger's seven years stands as a powerful deterrent to others. Dr. Francey left the Province. He went up into the North-West, and later I heard he was practising medicine in the western part of the United States.

"Mrs. Alger developed consumption in 1888 and died in 1895. That was seven years of suffering. Alger went to the penitentiary for the same length of time—seven years."

LIFE INSURANCE TROUBLE

From *Pickering News* 15 November 1895, p. 5

It is not the privilege of a newspaper to comment too freely upon any case that is before the courts, and so we refrain from saying some things that might well be said in regard to the crown proceedings at Whitby against George E. Alger charged with trying to defraud. But as the *Toronto World* has officially or officiously announced, in apparent behalf of Government detective John Murray, that proceedings will be taken against other prominent residents of Pickering, we feel at liberty to discuss this phase of the question—action not having been actually begun.

The *World* of Saturday adroitly handles this matter, following up the threat that other arrests would be made in a few days, with the statement that Mr. Broughall, of the Equitable Life stated that his company had cancelled a number of policies (giving the names of the insured). The same paper had a list of local agents who were interested in the affair. The inference intended to be conveyed, apparently, is that these persons are to be proceeded against, or at least that those of them who had their policies cancelled had obtained their insurance improperly.

We all know, however, that certain insurance companies reserve and exercise the right, without in many cases stating any cause, to cancel policies and return such premiums as have been paid. Dr. Francey was the medical examiner in all of the above cases, and the Equitable company, in view of its suspicions in the Alger case and in view of Francey's admissions in regard to that case, no doubt fell into an indiscriminate panic and cancelled all policies with which the discredited doctor had any connection. We are not afraid to predict that the Crown will hesitate to proceed against the persons so mentioned and against other persons whose names are being noised about so freely, as having conspired to swindle insurance companies.

No man, unless he be confined to bed with death closing in upon him, can tell how long he may live, or what his pains or ills may really amount to. The consumptive, even as he grows worse and worse gains confidence and fancies that he is recovering. A man depends upon his doctor. The Government imposes doctors upon us, so that every year we are put more and more at the mercy of the medical profession and know less and less of our own bodies. We are not allowed to prescribe for each other—we are encouraged to know nothing of each other's health. We must call in a doctor; we must believe in him.

When one is examined for life

of a swindler physician.

Dr. Francey has been from the first the living principle of whatever conspiracy or organized swindling may be discovered in this district.

His own evidence is sufficient to warrant this statement. Therefore we incline to the opinion that the Crown, as it proceeds with its researches, will become so convinced of this and so shamed at having granted immunity from prosecution to the prime offender, that it will abandon

the matter.

Dr. Francey came voluntarily back to Canada and was not induced to come by a guarantee of protection. This statement is definitely made and there is no reason to doubt it. Why



John Edwin Farewell (1840-1923),
Ontario County Crown Attorney.

J. E. FAREWELL, Q. C., BARRISTER, County Crown Attorney, and County Solicitor. Court House, Whitby. 10-y

insurance, the doctor is all-powerful. He can pass one or he can reject one. The only duty that devolves upon the applicant is to abstain from lying as to his past. All other responsibilities rest upon the doctor. No corruption, no swindle or any diversions can be put through without the connivance

was an order of protection granted him while his doings were uninvestigated and the extent of his guilt unknown? He alone had so bad a conscience that he fled the country. No others ran away. He now admits that he knew Mrs. Alger to be dying when he certified to her sound

health; that he was to share in the plunder; that the application prepared by himself and the prisoner was no honest, that he "could not imagine anything more dishonest." But he represents himself as being led astray by the prisoner.

If there are other cases—if the other policies cancelled are or were dishonest, does he pretend to say that Alger went about leading him astray in all parts of the township, or did every man he meet lead him astray? Is it not easier to believe that he was the corrupt person, since so much of his insurance business has to be cancelled? Dr. Francey may be a Crown witness, but he presents a sorry spectacle. He was apparently prepared to, at least "share in," any scheme to swindle insurance companies, yet when discovery threatens him his cowardice proves phenomenal.

It will not be forgotten by the trained judges before whom these cases may come, that he is confessing more through fear rather than because of repentance. It remains for judge and jury to decide what value may be put upon his evidence, where hitherto honorable men are besmirched in character by his testimony. We all desire to see the guilty punished.

If, however, the prime offender in these cases is allowed to escape through a hasty promise of safety granted him before the facts were known (before the case fell into the hands of the Crown and was yet but a civil action) it will not tend to increase popular respect for the process of law. It may suit the insurance companies to catch or terrify the sprats, but the Crown administers justice to all.

Dr. Francey may enjoy immunity from prosecution but he has not been granted the respect of honest men. He has forfeited that more completely than any other man connected with these cases, for, be he the arch-conspirator or not, he was, by training and education in a learn[ed]-profession, more responsible morally than any of his clients or patients.

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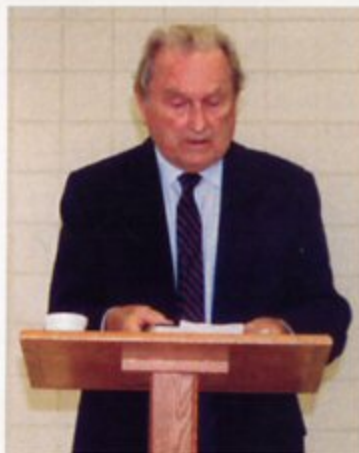
Pickering News 26 July 1895.

Photo: Wilson, *Chronicles of a Century: 1896*, p. 115.

MAKING OUR OWN HISTORY

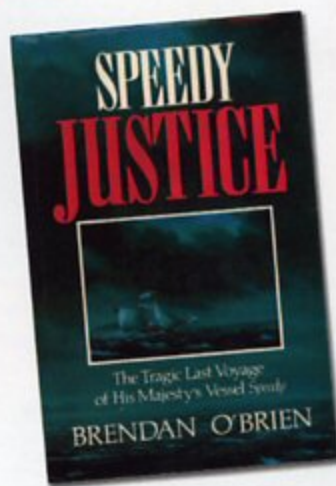
So far the PTHS has looked at few historic trades. But in June 2003, we had **Ray Fugeman**, a longtime clock- and watchmaker address us on the function of timepieces in the course of history—from the sundial through the hour glass to digital clocks and watches. As a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers of London, England, and a former employee of Hamilton Watch Canada and the Elgin Watch Company, Fugeman is a mine of information about clocks and watches and manufacture over the years. Fugeman was gracious enough to comment on the history and manufacture of clocks brought by members to the meeting for his analysis.

We began our seventh year in September with **Brendan O'Brien**,



author of *Speedy Justice: The Tragic Last Voyage of His Majesty's Vessel Speedy*. In 1804, the *Speedy*, under Captain Thomas Paxton, disappeared in a storm off Presqu'ile Peninsula with twenty persons aboard. The ship was bound for Newcastle (a new town being established at Presqu'ile)

where an alleged murderer was to be tried. Not only the prisoner, but also the judge, the Solicitor-General of Upper Canada, the defence counsel, and a number of witnesses were among those who lost their lives in this early tragedy of the young province.



in this area. One of our conservation areas once served as the site of one of the gang's hideouts. And one of our hamlets is named after a prominent member of the gang.

When we invited **Rob Leverty** of the Ontario Historical Society to be our November speaker—on the subject of preserving historic cemeteries—we had no idea how popular this topic would be. Rob told us how he and the OHS have been struggling for a number of years to prevent the desecration of old cemeteries to make way for new developments. The cost of defence has been high, not only in money, but also in time and energy, but they have made some notable successes. There are a number of people in Pickering and Ajax who would like to make sure our heritage cemeteries are protected as well as properly cared for.



**PICKERING
TOWNSHIP
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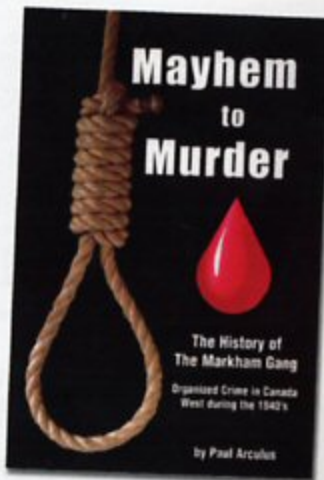
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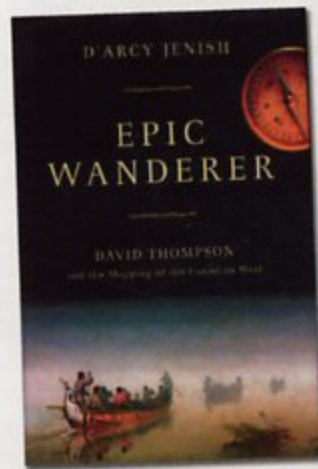
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Our October speaker was now frequent visitor **Paul Arculus** who had just completed his book on the history of the *Markham Gang: Mayhem to Murder*. This story continues to fascinate us because of the number of



Pickering connections to the gang's activities. The descendants of several of the victims of the gang still reside



D'Arcy Jenish, our December speaker, presented a succinct summary of his latest book *Epic Wanderer: David Thompson and the Mapping of the Canadian West*. A much-neglected explorer and mapmaker, Thompson may be finally getting his due with this first full-length biography.