

The Natural and Human History of Altona Forest



Larry Noonan 2008

HISTORY OF ALTONA FOREST

Part I up to 1900

18,000 BC – About 20,000 years ago, the last great Canadian ice sheet invaded southern Ontario. As the ice sheet retreated, a drumlinized till plain from the Oak Ridges Moraine south to what is now the Lake Ontario shoreline, was formed. The south drumlin hills formed islands in ancient Lake Iroquois.

10,000 BC – About 12,000 years ago, the waters of glacial Lake Iroquois cut a prominent fossil bluff just north of the Altona Forest Property, a remnant shoreline of this ancient glacial lake.

8000 BC – The meltwater from the receding glaciers sorted and stratified the soils into layers. These soils are underlain by more dense till layers at an average depth of 0.6 metres. Paleo-Indians, following the recession of the last glaciers, approached this area. They were nomads who hunted game and fished on and around the area's rivers. They also gathered wild plant food. They lived in an era of giant bears, woolly mammoth and other extinct mega-fauna.

3000 BC – The climate warmed sufficiently to allow the landscape to change from tundra, to boreal forest to deciduous forest. The natives continued to be hunters and gatherers who lived in camps. They carried tools of wood, bone and flint and eventually discovered the techniques to make ceramic pottery.

2000 BC to 1650 – Some natives started forms of agriculture allowing them to stay in one place longer and their camps could get larger. Near the end of this time frame, the natives were cultivating what is sometimes called the 'three sisters' – corn, beans and squash.

1660 – The Indian village of Gandatsekwagon, (Ganatsekwyagon) which appears on all the early maps of the French explorers, was well established as a centre of the beaver trade with the English and the Dutch traders, whose canoes plied back and forth across the lake, carrying a fortune in furs from the north shore of Lake Ontario to New York before the French came to our north shore in 1668. This village, or probably group of villages, was marked on Joliet's map, circa 1670, as being the southern tip of a portage known to the Indians, which brought them down from the eastern district of Lake Simcoe (lac Toronto) to the trading centre just east of the mouth of the Rouge River. In Percy Robinson's, "Toronto During the French Regime", the maps of Joliet, Raffle, and Bellied, all show distinctly that the trail begins east of the Rouge and goes north before it swings in a wide arc to the north west. (See Appendix A for more on these villages.)



Brock Road was an Old Indian trail. It leads to a high sandy ridge which has traces on both sides of it, of Indian occupation. Pottery artifacts found by Mr. Lome White, of the Iroquois period, and

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bones found by Mr. W. MacPherson, just west of the Brock Road, confirm native habitation. Silas Tool recalled that his grandfather spoke of this trail when he first purchased land at the corner of the Kingston Road and the Brock Road, in 1816.

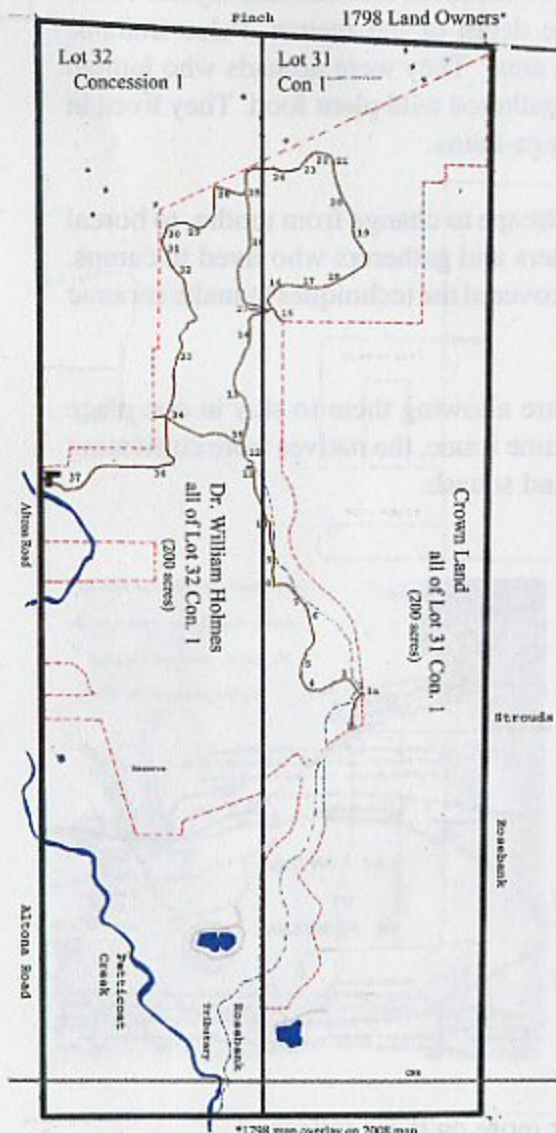
Certainly the area about the mouth of the Rouge River and Petticoat creek was the site of native habitation, since Mr. W. H. Moore, and Mr. Gerald Cowan, have found skinning knives, and arrow heads in this vicinity. A large collection of very ancient Indian relics has been collected by Mr. Hugh Squires, found by him on a sandy high strip of land behind his barn near the mouth of Duffin's Creek. This collection was identified by members of the Royal Ontario Museum staff as belonging to the Laurentian period which proved that there were people living in Pickering Township as long

as four thousand years ago. There were large native camps near the following streams — Duffin's Creek, Dunbarton Creek, Petticoat Creek and the Rouge River, as well as Frenchman's Bay.

It is very likely that the area of Altona Forest was one of the hunting areas for these 1st Nations peoples who probably visited many times. Arrow heads have been discovered in Altona Forest but there is no evidence of a village or even temporary camping by these early residents within the Forest. Further investigation will be done if it is warranted.

1669 – Two Sulpician priests, Fathers Fenelon and Trouve, started a school for Senecas at Frenchman's Bay. The Senecas hunted and fished in a wide area around present Pickering and it is very likely that they visited the area of Altona Forest a number of times to hunt or fish in Petticoat Creek. An Indian arrow head was found during a recent archeological dig in Altona Forest but no evidence has been found to indicate 1st Nations camped or stayed for longer periods in the area.

1791 – Engineer Augustus Jones started surveying all of Pickering in preparation for settlers. Altona Forest is located in Concession 1, Lots 31 and 32. (See map) The small river running through the area already had a French name, Rivière Petite Côte, (Little Hillside River) which soon became Petticoat Creek. This is one of the last reminders that this area was part of New France. The railroad tracks in the southwest of this map belong to the Grand Trunk.



Map #1

May 25, 1796 – Governor John Graves Simcoe ordered that Whitby, Pickering and ten other

townships be declared open to settlers. Enormous land grants were made to government officials, members of their families and to their friends as well as to some United Empire Loyalists.

TOWNSHIP OF PICKERING SOUTH										Concession	
No. of ENTRANCE	INSTRUMENT	THE DATE		DATE OF REGISTER		GRANTOR	GRANTEE	QUANTITY or L.S.D.	CONSIDERATION or AMOUNT of MONEY	REMARKS	
	Patent	May	22	1798			Holmes William	All			
10007	Pat	Dec	24	1832	Jan	9	Holmes Wm (Heirs)		£ 25		
10012	"	Sept	10	1840	Dec	18	Corran Henry & John	1/2	£ 25		
10013	Full	Aug	9	1842	Jan	12	Taylor John	1/2			
10014	Pat	Oct	15	1842	Oct	31	Corran Henry	1/2	£ 25		
10015	"	June	15	1852	June	21	Taylor Robert Wm	N.E. 1/4			
10016	"	Oct	4	1855	Sept	22	" Wm Robt Wm	S.W. 1/4			
10017	"	Sept	21	1852			John Wm				
10018	Pat						Gulbert Thomas				
10019	Pat	June	28			23	Taylor John		£ 25		
10020	Pat					23	Hettinger Samuel	S.E. 1/4			
10021	Pat					25	Taylor William		£ 25		
10022	Pat	Nov	18			25	Corran John	1/2	£ 25		
10023	Pat						Briggs Richard	1/2	£ 25		

May 22, 1798 – Patent was granted for Doctor William Holmes for ‘All’ of Con. 1 Lot 32. A substantial portion of this land eventually became Petticoat Creek valley land and Altona Forest Conservation Lands.¹ This area was just 200 of the 3400 acres granted to Dr. Holmes in Pickering. He may never have set foot on the property.

1800s – Much of Durham Region was once covered by an extensive forest of hardwoods and conifers. The area was intensively lumbered and cleared for farming. Lots 31 and 32 in Con. 1 has poor drainage and topographical constraints and was probably never completely farmed. It was, however, lumbered and allowed to regenerate likely only after farming failed.

1811 – A number of settlers were called to active service in preparation for the War of 1812. Some of these men came from Pickering. This state of readiness continued until war was declared and heightened throughout the war and for some time after.

Fences of Altona Forest

Many examples of fences have survived in Altona Forest. Fencing was one of the biggest jobs on farms. Time and labour was extensive when using stone and wood. Fences were sometimes used to mark land boundaries but most often to fence animals in or out. Often a farm would have a hierarchy of fencing, with more elaborate finished fencing, such as a picket fence near the house and the least refined further away. There are a variety of fence types in Altona Forest. Each one tells a story which when put together helps us to uncover more of the history of farming in Pickering and the history of the farms which once made up Altona Forest.

¹ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

Stone Fences

One of the earliest examples of fences in Altona Forest are made of stone. For the early settlers of most of North America, their livestock was one of their most important assets. Cows provide milk and beef. Pigs provided fresh pork, smoked and salted hams and bacon which kept well, and their fat rendered to make lard for pies. It was essential to keep their animals within easy access. The settlers needed fences to enclose their animals.

The accumulation of stones in cleared fields required that they be removed. This was done by hand or with the assistance of oxen or draft horses. Stones were hauled only as far as necessary which usually meant to nearest property line or a central location where they were piled high to take up as little as possible space. We have one example of a mound in Altona Forest located near interpretative post #26. Stones dropped near the property line were either deliberately made into fences or naturally developed over the years into elongated piles of stone walls. One example of this structure is found in Altona Forest south east of post 18 and just north of the boundary fence for homes along the north side of Summerpark Crescent. Two other stone wall sites have been located.

Other stone walls, if present, may have been removed later to create larger fields, to be replaced with more efficient fences or to drain the land. The remaining fence has been overgrown with crustose lichens and moss as trees grew larger all around it. The wall provides a unique stone habitat for a variety of small animals and insects.

Our stone fence is three to four feet wide and three feet high for most of its length. Some trees found a foot hold and have grown up in the top of the fence. Our stone fence may have been placed there by Benjiman Dixon as it appears on the south edge of his property.

Some stone fences built in other parts of North America are engraved with initials, usually on a square stone, which tells who built them and in what year and possibly as an identification of the land owner. An example could be Lacey 66, meaning built by farmer Lacey in 1866. No such markings have been found on the Altona Forest stone fence although no study has been made of that fence.

A stone fence wall can last forever if not destroyed for "progress".

Living fence

Tree-lines between fields or along property boundaries or as windbreaks, were effective ways to separate properties but not to act as a barrier for animals. It is difficult to recognize any of these types of fences in Altona Forest as the trees have mostly grown too high to separate the tree lines from the forest. The one exception is the property line which can be seen when hiking in for the Altona Road parking lot. The large pines on the north side of the clearing form a nearly straight line which was the location of one of the boundaries for this property.



Stone fence with over 100 years of fallen branches and other natural material on top of it.

Split Rail Cedar Snake Fence

In North America snake fencing (also known as worm fencing), was commonly used throughout the 18th and 19th centuries but slowly fell out of favour with the invention of barbed wire, in 1873. During the mid-1800s, the common practice was to fence in one's crops while letting livestock roam free. Later, fences were very important for keeping animals from eating the pioneers' crops.

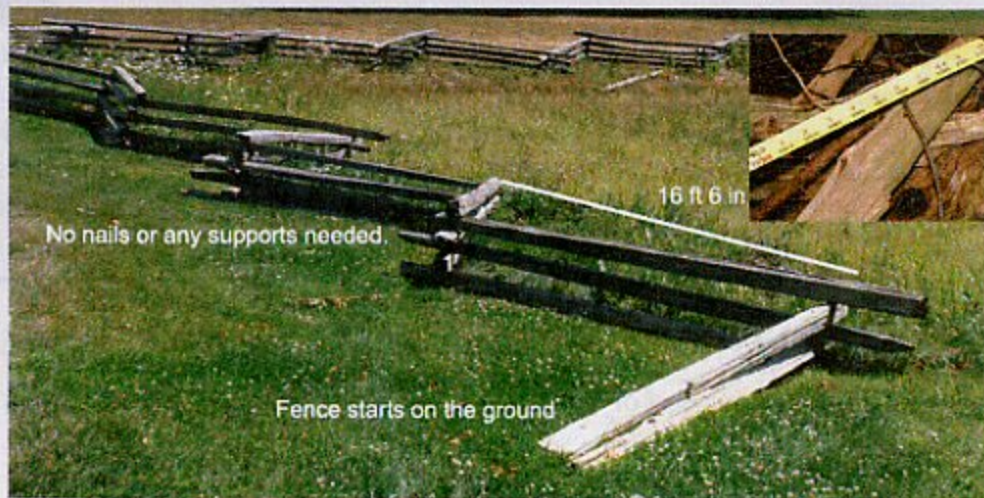
Some timber fences had the rails stacked directly on top of each other and secured them with double fence posts (one on either side of the rails). This made a more permanent and compact fence but remained easy to repair. No examples of this kind of split rail fence has been found in Altona Forest. Wooden fencing was constructed because wood was plentiful and the snake fencing was very easy to build and move. However, the fencing was inefficient, because its zigzag nature encompassed too much valuable land.

Cedar rail fences were not common in areas of few trees but where cedar trees were common. During winters many farmers split logs into rails for use in fence building the following spring. Because of the simple constructions and need for few tools even on hard or rocky ground as in much of Altona Forest, there are a number of these fences still to be seen. The split rails were usually cut to a length of 10 to 12 feet. Each half was then split into quarters, then eighths and so on until the rails were of a usable size. Depending on the diameter of the log, you could get 4 rails from an 8 inch log to over a dozen from larger logs. The pieces, called "rails," were stacked on top of one another. The length of a zig zag fence was such that the distance between either the zigs or the zags was $16\frac{1}{2}$ feet or one rod. A landowner could then count the zigs or the zags along the side and end of his field and determine the number of square rods in a field which in turn told him how many acres the field contained. One hundred sixty square rods is one acre, so a field ten rods wide and sixteen rods long was an acre.

Some rail fences have lasted for generations.

In recent years rail fences are often reinforced with a strand of barbed wire or electric wire.

In the photo, the measurement tape is from the actual Altona Forest snake fence.



1811 – The first of many by-laws governing fences in Pickering was passed. It stated “Voted that fences be four and one half feet high and not more than five inches between the rails.” The next 40 years saw many more fence by-laws pass because the animals ran free causing damage. Over 100 individual brands were registered for farmers in Pickering during the the 1800s.

Woven Fence

Woven wire fencing became popular early in the 1900s and was popular in areas where livestock were raised. Often this fence was topped with a single strand of barbed wire. This was not the case in Altona Forest. When Altona Forest was formed, both the northern and southern boundary exhibited woven wire fencing. (See map for other locations.)

This woven fence was located on the norther boundary of Altona forest.



Barbed Wire

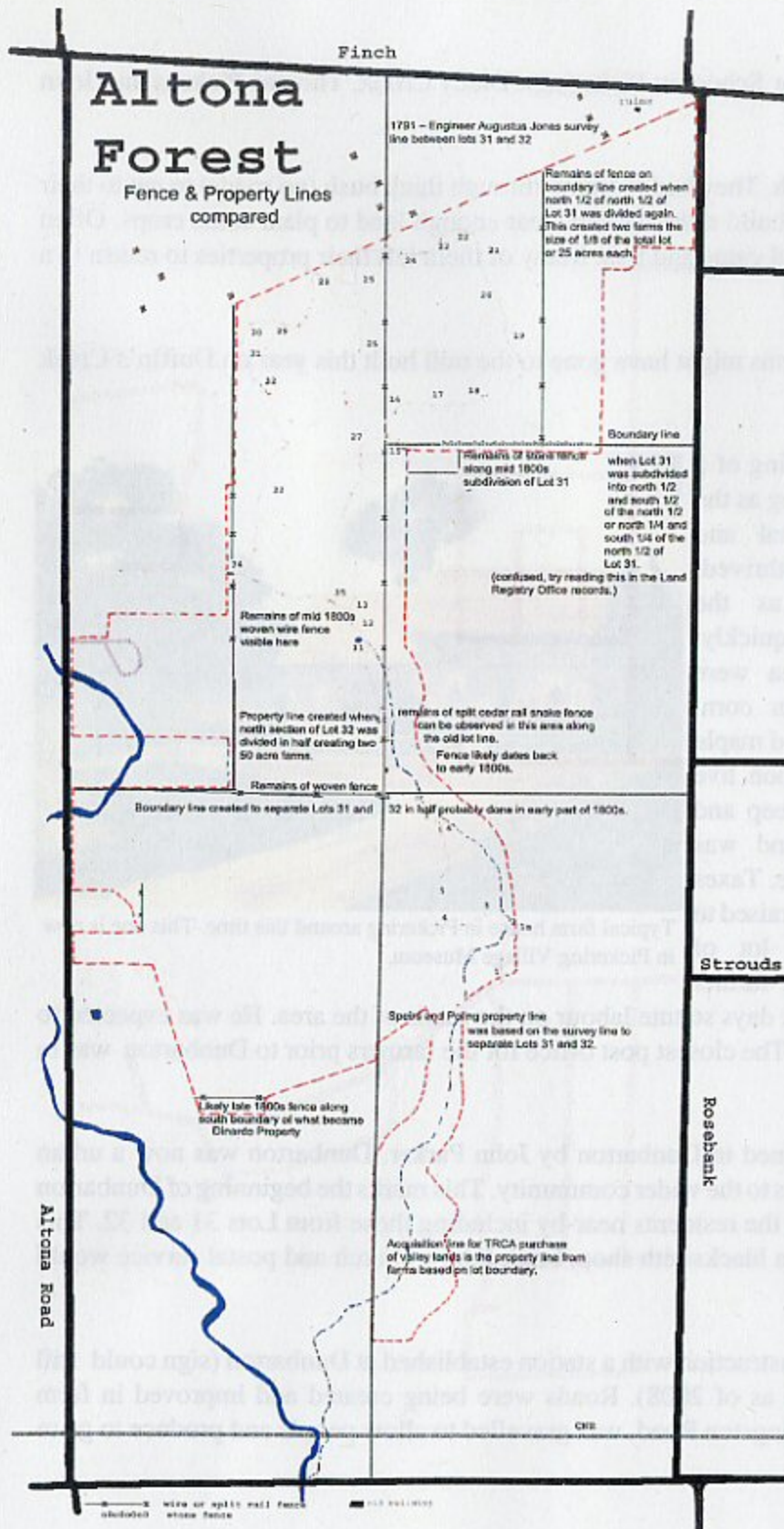
Without fencing, livestock grazed freely, competing for fodder and water. Where working farms existed, most property was unfenced and open to foraging cattle and sheep.

The first wire fences used one strand of wire, which was constantly broken by the weight of cattle pressing against it. Wire with two strings of wire twisted together with insert barbs, called barbed wire, first appeared around 1874. This stronger wire also repelled the cattle with their painful points. Barbed wire fences were cheaper to erect than their alternatives and when they became widely available in North America in the late 19th century, they made it affordable to fence much larger areas than before. When ceramic insulators are found on barbed wire, it is a clear indication that the wire was electrified. No ceramic insulators have been found in Altona Forest.



1830s – Much of the area east of Toronto was growing rapidly. Pickering saw an influx of settlers.

1831 – William Dunbar settled on Kingston Road where the village of Dunbarton would soon grow into an area centre.



Dec. 24, 1832 – The official records show that Lot 32 stayed in Dr. Holmes' possession until this date when he sold a portion to Henry Corran for £300. In 1840, he, in turn, sold the southern ½ for £50 to John Corran, who was probably his son. In 1849, Henry Corran sold the northern ½ to William Taylor for £300. A small portion of the northern part of Lot 32 and some of the southern part near Petticoat Creek, were more suitable for farming than most of the middle section. This may be one reason for the frequent sale of the property and its use for grazing animals rather than for extensive farming. This fact is also the reason that the area was allowed to revert back to a forest and eventually become one of most mature growth urban forests in southern Ontario with a unique collection of plants and animals.

William Holmes sold off other parcels of land in Lot 32 to other farmers who in turn sold off sections to others. Names which appeared in Pickering from 1832 to 1877 on Con.1 Lot 32 included: John and Robert Taylor, Henry Gorman, Samuel Hollinger, Henry Corran, Richard Briggs, John Bowles, William O'Neil, William

Dunbar (there is a William Dunbar School in Pickering), Darcy Crook, Thomas Pickens and John McIntosh.²

Early first settlers had it very tough. They had to tramp through thick bush (no roads) to get to their property. Once there, they had to build a shelter and clear enough land to plant some crops. Often they had to survive on berries, wild game and fish. Many of them left their properties to return to a more 'civilized' life.

1840 – The grain grown of the farms might have gone to the mill built this year on Duffin's Creek by Matthew Cockerline.

1850 – This was near the beginning of a period of development in Pickering as the municipal, industrial, educational and ecclesiastical establishments thrived. Pickering's population grew as the agricultural acreage expanded quickly. The common crops in the area were wheat, barley, rye, oats, Indian corn, potatoes and buckwheat. Wool and maple sugar was also produced. Common live stock included cattle, horses, sheep and hogs. The value of cleared land was estimated at £5 5 shillings per acre. Taxes on the average 100 acre farm was raised to £2 and this likely caused a lot of complaining. At this time, each farmer



Typical farm house in Pickering around this time. This one is now in Pickering Village Museum.

was also required to do five or six days statute labour on the roads of the area. He was expected to bring his team of horses to assist. The closest post office for the farmers prior to Dunbarton was in Claremont.

1851 – A General Store was opened in Dunbarton by John Parker. Dunbarton was now a urban centre which offered more services to the wider community. This marks the beginning of Dunbarton village as an important centre for the residents near-by including those from Lots 31 and 32. This village now had a store but soon a blacksmith shop, brick kiln, a church and postal service would arrive here.

The railways soon were under construction with a station established at Dunbarton (sign could still be seen along GO Transit tracks as of 2008). Roads were being created and improved in farm country as the road to Toronto, Kingston Road, was gravelled to allow people and produce to go to the bigger city and back.

² Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

Feb. 19, 1853 – A patent was granted to James Peters for 100 acres in the north ½ of Con. 1, Lot 31. This also became part of the land which became Altona Forest.⁴

Feb. 18, 1854 – James Peters sold off part of his property in the north ½ of Con. 1 Lot 31 to Joseph and John White.⁵

April 6, 1854 – James Peters sold off part of his property in the north ½ of Con. 1 Lot 31 to William Taylor.⁶

Sept. 26, 1854 – William Taylor sold off part of his property in the north ½ of Con. 1 Lot 31 to Elizabeth Dixon (age 30)⁷ who attempted to farm the area with her husband Benjiman Dixon (age 30). Their farm was located south of the village of Cherrywood and northwest of the village of Dunbarton. The Dixons had at least three children, Mary Ann, Christina and Jannet. Mary Ann is listed as the owner of this property from 1911 to at least 1917.

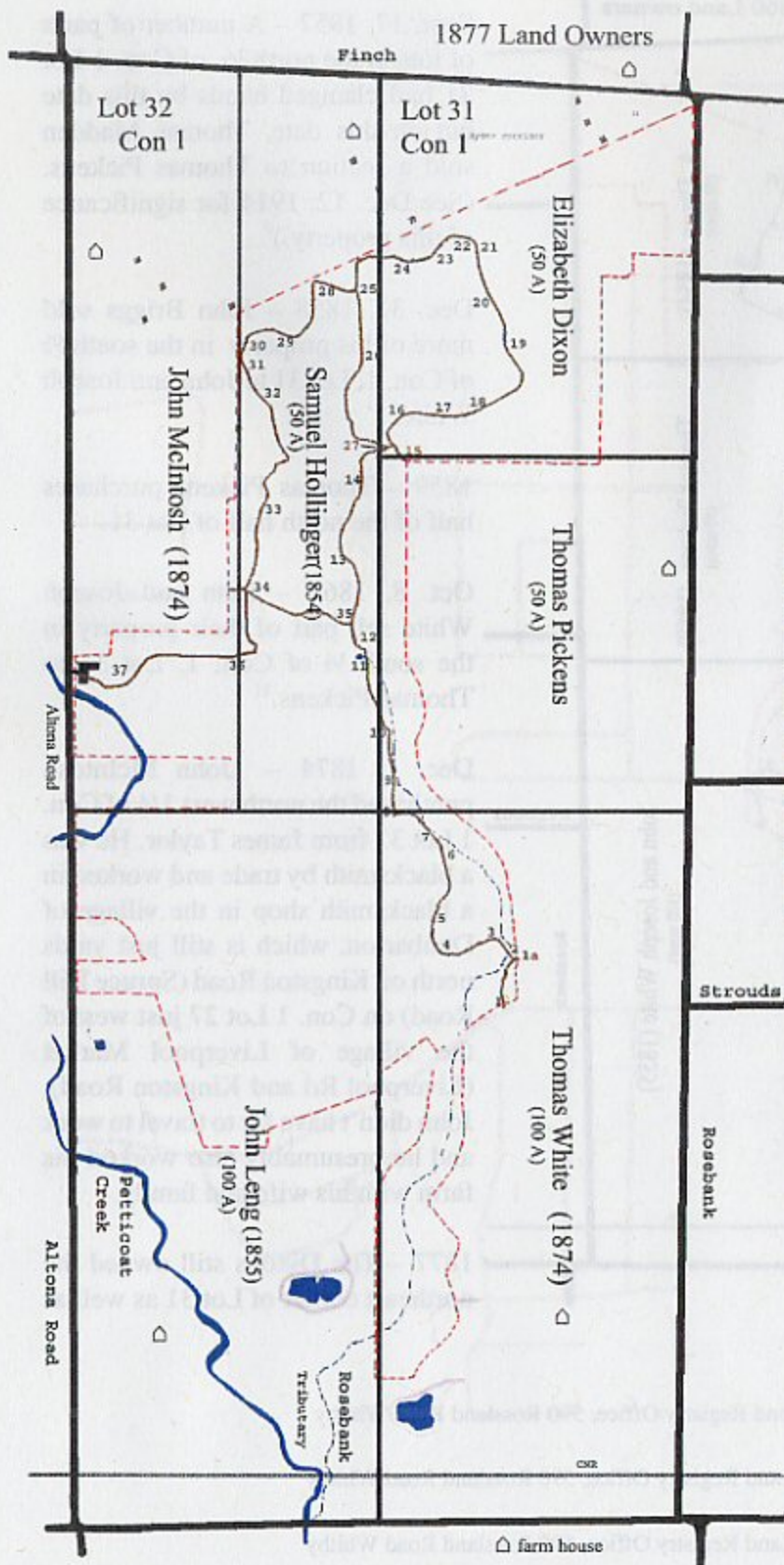
TOWNSHIP OF PICKERING SOUTH

NO. OF REGISTER	INSTRUMENT	DATE	DATE OF REGISTER	GRANTOR	GRANTEE	QUANTITY	CLASSIFICATION OF PROPERTY
1000	Patent	Feb. 19 1853	June 25 1853	James Peters	John Briggs	100 acres	
1001	Deed	Feb. 18 1854	June 25 1854	James Peters	John & Joseph White	100 acres	
1002	Deed	Apr. 6 1854	June 25 1854	James Peters	William Taylor	100 acres	
1003	Deed	Sept. 26 1854	June 25 1854	William Taylor	Elizabeth Dixon	100 acres	
1004	Deed	June 25 1855	June 25 1855	John Briggs	John & Joseph White	100 acres	
1005	Deed	June 25 1855	June 25 1855	John Briggs	John & Joseph White	100 acres	
1006	Deed	June 25 1855	June 25 1855	John Briggs	John & Joseph White	100 acres	
1007	Deed	June 25 1855	June 25 1855	John Briggs	John & Joseph White	100 acres	
1008	Deed	June 25 1855	June 25 1855	John Briggs	John & Joseph White	100 acres	
1009	Deed	June 25 1855	June 25 1855	John Briggs	John & Joseph White	100 acres	
1010	Deed	June 25 1855	June 25 1855	John Briggs	John & Joseph White	100 acres	

1855 grant to John Briggs.

June 25, 1855 – The next entry into the Land Registry Book shows that John Briggs sold off some of his property in the south ½ of Con. 1, Lot 31 to John and Joseph White.⁸ A familiar name in the area.

⁴ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby
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the southeast corner of Lot 31 in Concession 2 across what is now Finch Avenue. The 1877 map shows that they built a farmhouse on the property in Con. 2 very close to Finch. Later an archaeological study was done of one of the Dixon's garbage sites which is now contained in Altona Forest. (See July 27, 2000)



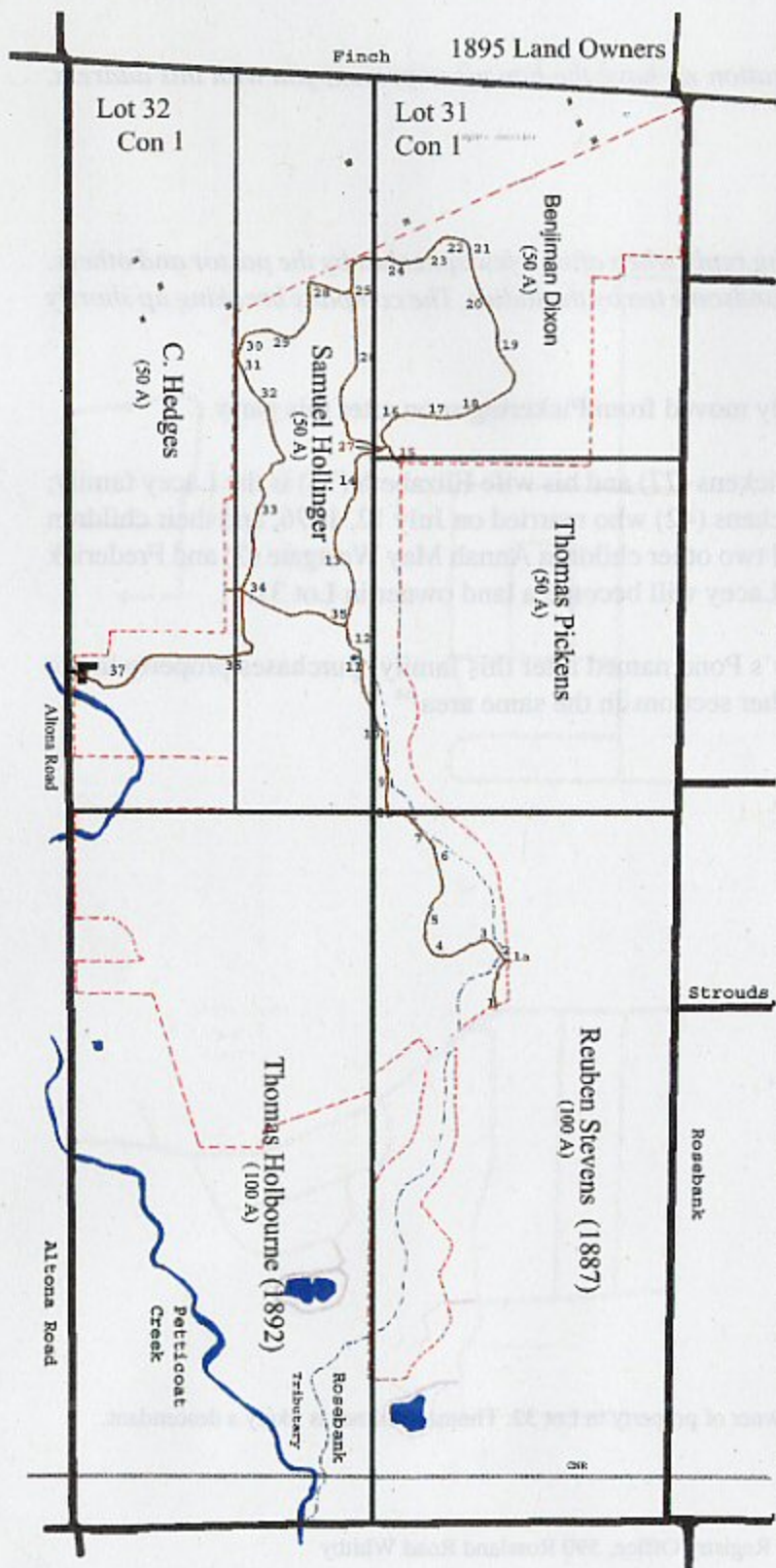
This table setting shows some of the more common forms of entertainment for the farmers.

Oct. 25, 1892 – John McIntosh was well liked in the community as can be seen in the following article, copied from the Pickering News from October 28, 1892. It is included here to give the reader a feeling of the social life of residents of Pickering in the 1800s and in particular one of the residents of what would one day become Altona Forest.

On Tuesday evening the friends of John McIntosh met at his place and spent a pleasant time during which the following address was presented together with a beautiful easy chair and lamp.

To John McIntosh, Esq.,

Dear Sir:—The members and adherent of Dunbarton Presbyterian church, having learned, with deep regret, of your intention to take up your residence outside the limits of their congregation, desire before your departure to give expression in some tangible form to their appreciation of the great zeal and singleness of heart and mind displayed by you in everything connected with the interest of the church and the good of the community. There fore you are requested to accept this chair as a token of their affection and esteem and they sincerely hope and pray that God may spare you for many years to occupy it in administering the affairs of your devoted family, and studying what is best adapted to advance the spiritual and moral condition - of the locality in which you are about to reside. The sorrow they feel because of you removal from among them is also shared in a like degree for your devoted wife and family, and they ask Mrs. McIntosh to accept this lamp as an assurance from them that her industry, thrift and hospitality were appreciated and admired by them all. It is their earnest desire and prayer that the divine Providence, by whom you have been led



hitherto, may grant you wisdom, strength, courage and success in every department of work to which your attention may be directed.

*Signed on behalf of the congregation we have the honour to present you with this address.
Agnes, Thom, Maggie Holmes¹²*

Oct 25th, 1892.

Mr. McIntosh made a very feeling reply when after a few speeches by the pastor and others, the company were treated to a handsome tea by the ladies. The company breaking up shortly before midnight.¹³

John sold his farm and he and his family moved from Pickering soon after this party.

April 21, 1891 – Living with Thomas Pickens (77) and his wife Elizabeth (76) is the Lacey family; Thomas (40), and his wife Margaret Pickens (42) who married on July 12, 1876, and their children Carlote (16), William Thomas (14) and two other children Annah May Westgate (7) and Frederick Westgate (2). Five years later Thomas Lacey will become a land owner in Lot 31.

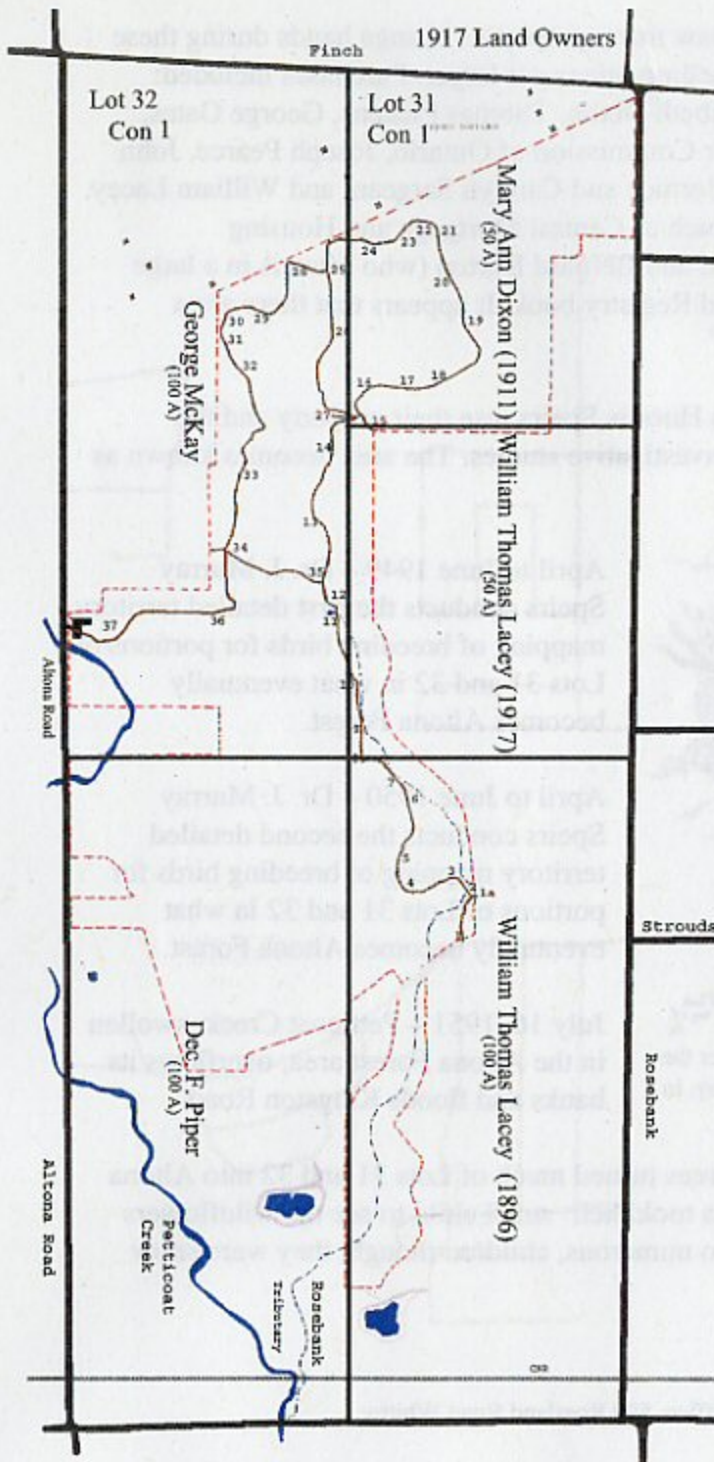
Aug. 17, 1896 – Thomas Lacey (Lacey's Pond named after this family) purchases property in the south ½ of Con. 1, Lot 31 as well as other sections in the same area.¹⁴

¹² Dr. William Holmes was the first owner of property in Lot 32. Thomas Holmes is likely a descendant.

¹³ Pickering News, October 28, 1892.

¹⁴ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

PART II 1900 - 1999



1910 – Home delivery of mail started for the residents of Con. 1, Lots 31 and 32.

Dec. 12, 1914 – Margaret Lacey, who was granted a Petition of Administration for William Dixon's property in the north ½ of Con. 1 Lot 31, sold it to William Thomas Lacey and Victor Samuel Lacey. It is after this family that Lacey's Pond is named. This family also bought other properties in Con. 1 Lot 31.¹

Jan. 19, 1915 to May 30, 1927 the Land Registration book contains 6 land transactions in the south ½ of Con. 1, Lot 31 which all involve William or Thomas Lacey. They continue to purchase land



Woven wire fence between farms in Lot 31.

¹ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

into the 1930s.²

1915 to 1949 – The north ½ of Con. 1 Lot 31 saw many properties change hands during these years as the property sizes got smaller and the selling prices got larger. Purchases included: Madden Thomas, Joseph and John White, Elizabeth Dixon, Thomas Pickens, George Gates, Reginald John Dijou, The Hydro Electric Power Commission of Ontario, Joseph Pearce, John Tobey, Dorothy Broadhurst, Joseph, Madeline, Bernice and Carelyn Sargeant and William Lacey. While in the south ½ of Con. 1, Lot 31 names such as Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Bernice Sargeant, Joseph Sargeant, and Bernard Burton (who often is in a large group of purchases “in trust”) appear in the Land Registry book. It appears that there are a number of speculators buying land at this time.³

1948 – Dr. J. Murray Speirs and his wife, Doris Huestis Speirs, use their property and the adjoining forest as a centre for environmental investigative studies. The area becomes known as the Altona Road Bird Sanctuary.⁴



Beautiful line drawing of the Petticoat Creek as it goes under the Altona Road bridge done by a local resident, Hugh McCulley, in 1954.

April to June 1949 – Dr. J. Murray Speirs conducts the first detailed territory mapping of breeding birds for portions of Lots 31 and 32 in what eventually becomes Altona Forest.

April to June 1950 – Dr. J. Murray Speirs conducts the second detailed territory mapping of breeding birds for portions of Lots 31 and 32 in what eventually becomes Altona Forest.

July 16, 1951 – Petticoat Creek, swollen in the Altona Forest area, overflows its banks and floods Kingston Road.

1950 to 1969 – After farming stopped and the trees turned much of Lots 31 and 32 into Altona Forest, the area was used for enjoyment. Parents took their small child to see the wildflowers each spring. The banks of trilliums used to be so numerous, children thought they were snow

² Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

³ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

⁴ Green Acres Estates Environmental Impact Analysis, prepared for Grant Morris by Henry Kortekaas & Associates Inc., Landscape Architects, May 31 1988

covering the forest floor. In the ponds could be seen fairy shrimp—tiny pink dwellers of forest ponds which hatch each spring. An abundance of fairy shrimp is an indication of a healthy pond. The chorus of a variety of frog species was heard each spring. Also in spring, the Forest was full of migrating birds – whip-poor-wills who called at night, woodcocks doing their fluttering spring mating flights along the forest edge, wood-ducks nesting near the pond, oven birds and colourful warblers of many kinds, including some nesting on the ground. The migrants seldom stop by now, because the forest has been surrounded by development. But some wonderful birds are still there, including Great Horned Owls, Barred Owls, Coopers’ Hawks, Red-Tailed Hawks, Pileated Woodpeckers, and the forest-edge birds and feeder birds, such as cardinals, chickadees, Nut Hatches, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, and Bluejays, Crows and many more.. (See Map of Altona Forest before housing developments.)

A forest that is managing to survive, even thrive, in the midst of intensifying urban sprawl should be treasured. Nevertheless, during the 1950s and 60s, land developers started purchasing property in Pickering for development and the Altona Forest was a prime area for this activity.

1950 – During this year the predominant use of the land in Lots 31 and 32 was still farmland which included grazing of animals. A number of resident houses had appeared along Altona Road, Finch, Sheppard and Rosebank as property owners subdivided their property.

1954 – Sections of Lots 31 and 32 were no longer in active agriculture. The north side of Lot 31 was still used for agriculture while the middle, where it was more moist with ponds, had reverted back to a wet woodland. The south part has fields that were left fallow. Most of Lot 32, where the majority of Altona Forest now exists, had already reverted back to a mature forest with wetlands, cedar bog, deciduous forest, coniferous forest and mixed forest. Much of the north portion was Hydro property and open field.(See vegetative Map)



1954 aerial photo of Altona Forest and surrounding area showing portion in farming and the mature forest.

Oct. 14, 1954 – Prominent and one day major benefactor for Altona Forest, John Murray Speirs and Doris Speirs appear in the Land Registry book as land owners in Con. 1 Lot 32.⁵

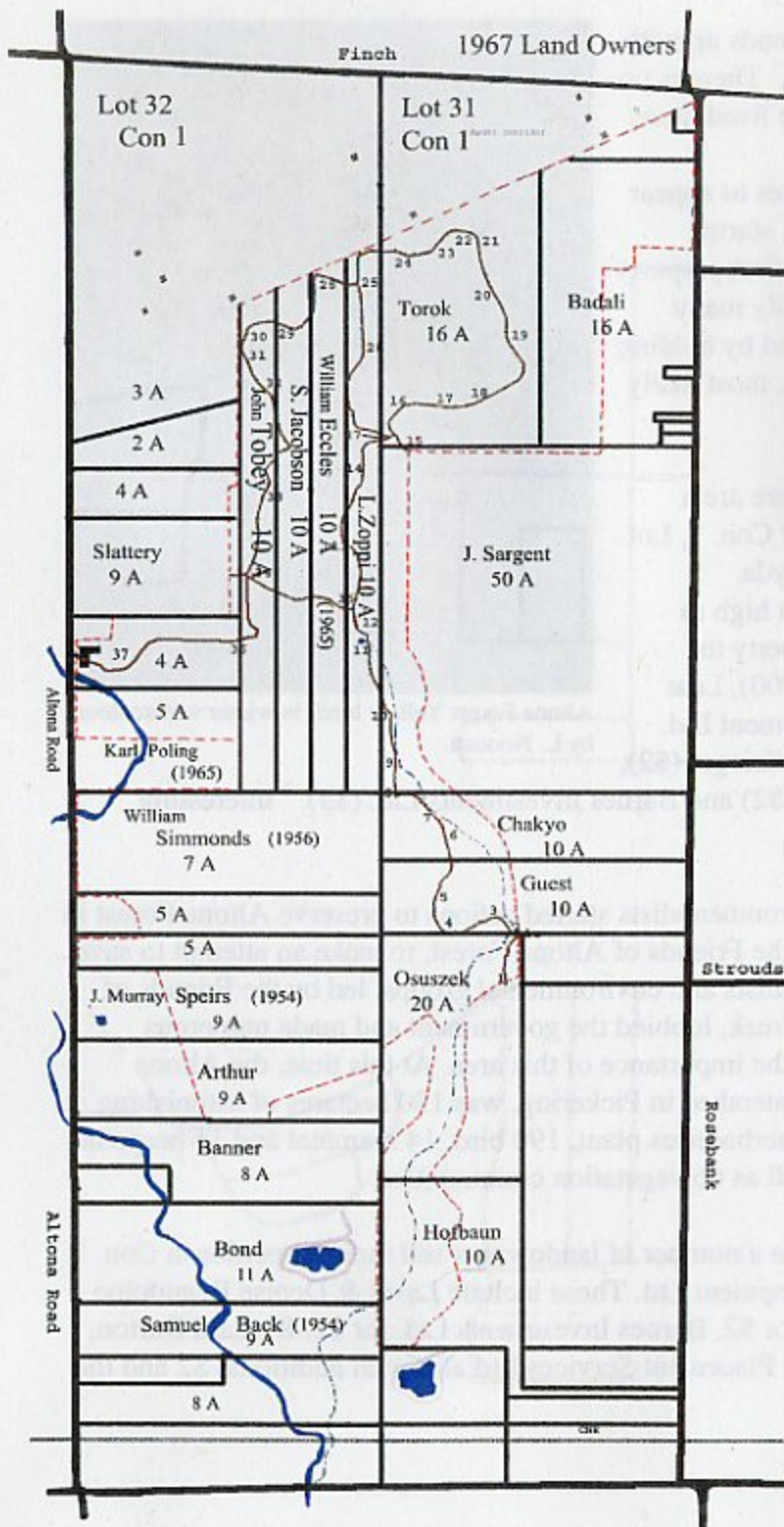
⁵ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby



Altona Forest

Vegetative Cover

- 1 White cedar
- 2 Grass/weeds, goldenrod, ticktrefoil, aster, vetch, w. elm, milkweed, w. ash, g. ash, pear, apple, white turtle head
- 3 Wet meadow sedges, rush, joe pyeweed, bonaset, gr. ash, dogwood, willow, **aspen**
- 4 T. aspen, w. pine, su. maple, gr. ash
- 5 W. cedar, w. pine, w. ash, w. elm, apple
- 6 T. aspen, b. poplar, gr. ash, w. cedar, w. elm
- 7 Su. maple, ironwood, w. elm, basswood, hemlock
- 8 Sugar maple, hemlock
- 9 Bl. ash, gr. ash, w. cedar, white elm
- 10 Su. maple, hemlock, w. cedar
- 11 Bl. ash, w. cedar, w. elm, trembling aspen
- 12 Tr. aspen, perfoliated bellwort
- 13 Trembling aspen
- 14 W. cedar, hemlock, sugar su. maple, bl. cherry, w. ash
- 15 W. pine, trembling aspen, hemlock, white cedar
- 16 T. aspen, w. cedar, gr. ash, balsam fir
- 17 W. cedar, w. pine, w. birch, hemlock
- 18 Marsh
- 19 Gr. ash, w. birch, w. cedar, basswood, hawhorn, tr. aspen, balsam poplar, white pine
- 20 W. cedar, w. pine, b. cherry
- 21 B. & gr. ash, w. elm, w. cedar
- 22 Thicket-dogwood, willow, cranberry, w. cedar, t. aspen
- 23 B. ash, t. aspen, w. cedar, gr. ash, hemlock, b. poplar, white elm, balsam fir
- 24 Si. & su. maple, w. elm
- 25 Su. maple, ironwood, w. ash, basswood, beech, w. birch
- 26 W. cedar, gr. ash, bl. ash, hemlock, white elm
- 27 Hemlock, beech, w. ash, hemlock, white elm
- 28 Hemlock, w. cedar, su. maple, white birch
- 29 W. cedar, hemlock, sugar maple, w. pine, green ash
- 30 Su. maple, ironwood, w. ash, basswood, w. birch, beech
- 31 Gr. ash, w. elm, w. pine, w. cedar, basswood, apple
- 32 W. cedar, w. birch, balsam fir, su. maple, tr. aspen
- 33 Su. maple, hemlock, white birch, ironwood, w. cedar
- 34 W. cedar, w. elm, w. pine, gr. ash, apple
- 35 W. ash, w. birch, w. pine, t. aspen, ironwood
- R Residential-exotic with ash, maple, weeping willow



October 15, 1954 – Hurricane Hazel passes through southern Ontario hitting Toronto severely and dropping torrential rain onto Altona Forest. Petticoat Creek became a raging river while Rosebank Tributary swelled to overflowing. Being on higher ground, no severe damage was done in our study area. Hurricane Hazel was a reason for the establishment of the Conservation Authorities across the province. Among other things, the Authorities were to protect flood plains and build check dams etc to protect the population from another hurricane. Without the MTRCA, Altona Forest would have been developed along with Petticoat Creek valley.

1960s – A group of young teens from the area decided to build a log cabin. They did so using long standing techniques of notching the ends etc. The cabin was roofless but provided them with a great deal of playing fun. This log cabin was so well built that it lasted in the same spot into the next millennium.

June 21, 1965 – Long time resident in the Altona Forest area, Karl H. and Liesbeth Poling appear on the Land Registry book as land owners in Con. 1 Lot 32. During 1965 they add a number of properties in Lot 32 Con. 1 to their land holdings.⁶

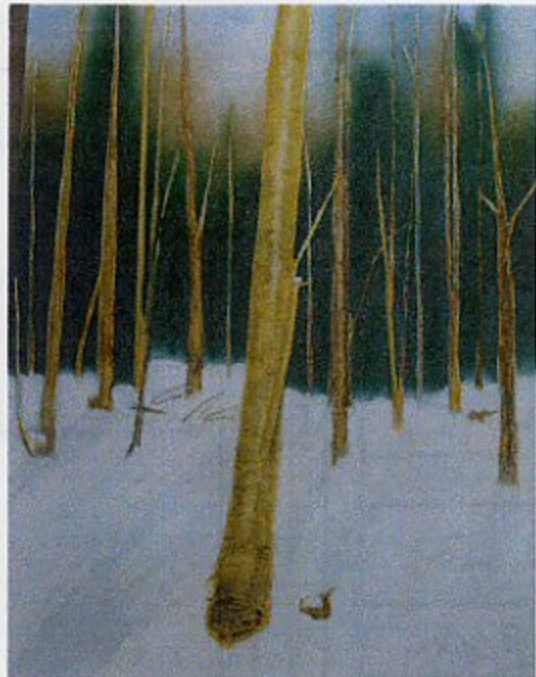
Dec. 2, 1968 – Bernard Burton starts acquiring larger tracts of land in Con. 1, Lot 32. According

⁶ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

to Land Registry records, he eventually ends up with a large number of properties in this area.⁷ There is no evidence that he farmed the land or even lived there.

Jan. 31, 1969 – One of the first companies to appear in the area, Victoria and Grey Trust Co., started purchasing land in Con. 1 Lot 32. Their first property acquisition cost them \$10,200. Eventually many properties in Con. 1 Lot 32 will be owned by holding companies, Banks, and other companies, most likely for speculation.⁸

Aug. 19, 1971 -- Starting on this date there are a number of transactions in the south ½ of Con. 1, Lot 31 involving Bernard Burton with Belmyda Investments for funds as low as \$2 and a high as \$149,900. Trustee Burton also sold property to Terminal Placement Services Ltd.(\$51,000), Lear Investments Ltd. (\$2), Minerva Development Ltd. (\$2), Serbia Holdings Ltd. (\$2), Hannal Krieger (\$2), Florence Smart (\$2), Atler Palmer Ltd. (\$2) and Barnes Investments Ltd. (\$5).⁹ Interesting prices for such valued land.



Altona Forest Yellow birch in winter watercolour by L. Noonan.

1972 –Katherine Murray and other environmentalists started actions to preserve Altona Forest in Pickering. They formed a group, called the Friends of Altona Forest, to make an attempt to save all or part of the forest. Residents, naturalists and environmental groups, led by the Friends of Altona Forest and Friends of Petticoat Creek, lobbied the government and made numerous presentations in an attempt to point out the importance of this area. At this time, the Altona Forest, situated in the Petticoat Creek watershed in Pickering, was 130 hectares of astonishing diversity. It had 30 tree, 40 shrub, 200 herbaceous plant, 190 bird, 14 mammal and 15 herpetile (amphibians and reptiles) species, as well as 66 vegetation communities.

June 15, 1972 – Starting around this time a number of landowners sell their properties in Con. 1, Lot 32 to Bramalea Consolidated Development Ltd. These include Laval & Denise Beaudoine for \$2, Swift Currant Investments Ltd. for \$2, Barnes Investments Ltd. for \$2, Bernard Burton, Belmyda Investments Ltd. and Terminal Placement Services Ltd all for an additional \$2 and the

⁷ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

⁸ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

⁹ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

Bank of Nova Scotia for the grand sum of \$1.¹⁰

Aug. 21, 1972 – Swift Current Investments Ltd. Sells 10.241 acres of property in the south ½ of Con. 1, Lot 31 to Bramalea Consolidated Developments Ltd. for \$2. On the same day Bramalea purchases 10.286 acres from Ann Chayko for the sum of \$2.¹¹

Aug. 28, 1972 – Bernard Burton (trustee) leads a group which includes Belmyda Investments Ltd, Piebald Investments Ltd. and Terminal Placement Services Ltd. in a sale of 10.030 acres in the south ½ of Con. 1, Lot 31 for the sum of \$2.¹² The official price of \$2 for many of these properties indicates that these companies were probably a part of the Bramalea group of companies.

Around this time, Bramalea held consultations with both the Town of Pickering and interested parties including Dr. J. Murray Speirs and other neighbours. Had they intended to bulldoze the forest with no consideration or giving time for alternatives to be investigated, and given the political climate of the time, they in all likely hood could have prepared their land for development by cutting down all the trees and quickly draining all the wetlands and then applying for permits to build. According to Victor Lind, an employee of Bramalea Consolidated Development Ltd. at the time, “the ecological significance of this land was reinforced to me personally on a visit (in Altona Forest) on a site I arranged in 1980s with Town officials and our Consulting Landscape Architect when we happened across an entire field of rare lady slipper orchids. After this, we redoubled our efforts to protect this parcel, studying ways to plan around it and discouraging dumping, cutting and vandalism. I am not entirely pleased with the amount of development that was permitted, however, this was done after Bramalea lost control of the land.”¹³ According to Victor Lind, Bramalea spent over \$100,000 on environmental preparation and presumably studies of the area.



Dr. J. Murray Speirs

After the Town designated portions of Altona Forest for development and in preparation for building houses in that part of the Altona Forest area, Bramalea started to slowly drain the wet lands within the forest which resulted in damage to some of the natural habitat. It was around this time that Lacey’s pond was drained and a water monitor installed near the pond to check the

¹⁰ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

¹¹ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

¹² Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

¹³ Letter from Victor Lind to Larry Noonan re the history of Altona Forest, undated

ground water.

Dec. 17, 1972 – Swift Current Investments Ltd purchased property in the north ½ of Con. 1 Lot 31 for \$52,819.¹⁴

Aug. 21, 1972 – Swift Current Investments Ltd. sold its property in the north ½ of Con. 1 Lot 31 to Bramalea Consolidated Development Ltd. for \$2. This is the same property it purchased for \$52,819, again indicating that this was a holding company for Bramalea.¹⁵

Aug. 21, 1972 – Bramalea purchased another property in the north ½ of Con. 1 Lot 31 from Paul Torok & Joseph Schwarzli Partnership Property for the sum of \$2.¹⁶ Another holding company?

Sept. 1, 1972 – Bramalea purchased a large amount of property in the north ½ of Con. 1 Lot 31 from Robert J. Opekar for \$2.¹⁷

Oct. 31, 1972 – Between this date and Feb. 26, 1974, Bramalea purchased three more properties in the north ½ of Con. 1 Lot 31 for \$1, \$2 and \$1.¹⁸



White and red trilliums use to be a standard spring flower marking new beginnings. Up to the 2000s, these flowers were visible in vast quantities. Deer have reduced their numbers drastically.

¹⁴ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

¹⁵ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

¹⁶ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

¹⁷ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

¹⁸ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

1973 – Part of Lot 32, known as the Speirs Woodlot, was recommended as an International Biophysical Program region. The recommendation was made by Dr. J. M. Speirs and Ian McDonald. The area was 154 acres in size. They recommended that the central forest block be preserved along with an outer fringe of young trees.¹⁹



Trout lily, a spring time tradition in Altona Forest

June 30, 1973 – Bramalea Consolidated Development Ltd. continued to assemble land in Con. 1 Lot 32 with the purchase of property from Belmyda Investments Ltd, Piebald Investments Ltd and Terminal Placement Services Ltd for the total sum of \$2.²⁰

April 5, 1973 – An interesting entry in the Land Registry book lists “Her Majesty the Queen” purchasing 5 properties; one from a private landowner and the other four from Bramalea. These were probably purchased by the Township or the Region for road right of ways.²¹

Oct. 4, 1973 – The Bank of Nova Scotia sold three parcels of land, each 0.75 acres, to Bramalea Consolidated Development Ltd. for \$2 a parcel. During the 1970s, Bramalea and the Bank of Nova Scotia sold property back and forth in Con. 1 Lot 31 and 32 a number of times. This likely had to do with mortgages and other paper transactions.²²

1975 – Dr. J. Murray Speirs proposes a bird sanctuary in the area known as Altona Forest.²³

March 12, 1975 – Bramalea Consolidated Developments Ltd. purchases another section of property in the north ½ of Con. 1 Lot 31 for \$1. It appears that Bramalea had many trust or

¹⁹ Biophysical Resource Assessment for Bramalea Highbush Subdivision, Dec. 17, 1993

²⁰ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

²¹ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

²² Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

²³ The Bay News, Altona Forest project headache for landowner, March 29, 1995 p. 8

holding companies acquiring land for them in the 1970s.²⁴

1977 – Pickering Naturalists was founded by Dr. J. Murray Speirs, professor of Zoology at University of Toronto and ornithology researcher who lived on the edge of Altona Forest on Altona Road in Pickering and Edgerton (Edge) Pegg, a local farmer. It was created as a lobby for environmentalists and for natural history study and recreation. In the course of his birding, Dr. Speirs met many other birders and nature lovers. His students conducted quadrant studies in his woodlot portion of Altona Forest thus becoming some of first to use this forest for studies. Dr. Speirs students divided the south portion of the forest into quadrants and conducted scrupulous studies of the flora and fauna in each quadrant. Every tree, special plant, bird, insect and animal was recorded and its place marked. Students and scientists now studying this rare wild forest in an urban setting can use these records as a baseline of what was there. It is a treasury for the future.

All of this work helped to draw attention to the forest as a unique environmental area and inspire people to take steps to save the forest later when it was threatened with development.

Sept. 14, 1977 –Bramalea purchased more property in the south ½ of Con. 1, Lot 31 from Bernard Burton (trustee) with Belmyda Investments Ltd, Piebald Investment Ltd. and Terminal Placement Services Ltd. for the sum of \$2.²⁵

1980 - 1985 – During this time some major diversion ditches were constructed. One, parallel to Rosebank Road, was up to 3 metres deep and took water from the north section and diverted water from a south eastern flow, south to Rosebank Tributary and then on to Petticoat Creek. This ditch can be seen from aerial photos as well as maps from the time. Rosebank Tributary was deepened to drain Lacey's Pond and other ditches were constructed as well.²⁶ (See aerial photo with drainage ditch)

²⁴ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

²⁵ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

²⁶ Biophysical Resource Assessment for Bramalea Highbush Subdivision, Dec. 17, 1993



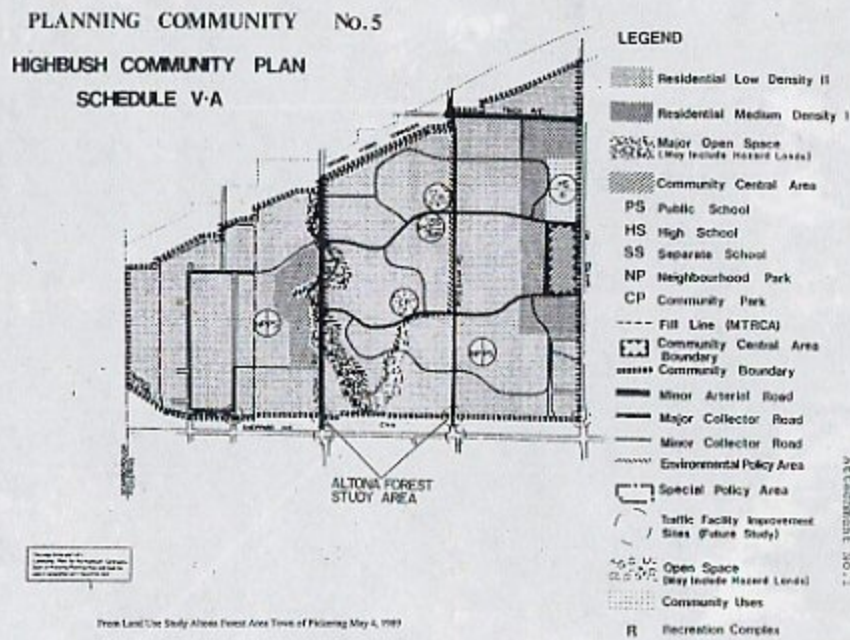
This map of Altona Forest was created by Bramalea Ltd. The farmland is clearly visible as is the Environmental Sensitive Area with the three ponds. The future roads are shown. The protected portion of Altona Forest is very close to what it eventually became. Drainage ditch can be seen as a straight line down the east side of the map and turning west to meet Rosebank Tributary.

1982 – A report on Altona Forest recommended 65 acres of the 330 acre development be saved as parkland.²⁷ This recommendation was ignored when the “Preferred” Plan for development was created in 1988.

1982 The MTRCA designated much of the area as an Environmental Sensitive Area (ESA) after it satisfied four of the seven criteria. An area must satisfy one or more criteria for its designation as an ESA. The criteria satisfied were:

- Criterion 2 c - area functions as a resting and feeding area for migratory warblers, osprey, dark-eyed junco and wood duck. It also supported large concentrations of winter birds such as the rare Bohemian waxwing and the Oregon junco.
- Criterion 4 - the area provided habitat for the red-shouldered hawk.
- Criterion 5 - the area has a high diversity of biological communities, including: old field; remnant apple, orchard; cedar woods; cattail marsh; secondary poplar/beechn community; and dense maple, hemlock, climax community. As a result, it favoured the following nesting species: northern goshawk, red-shouldered hawk, great horned owl, saw-whet owl, pileated woodpecker. Other species found there include: ruffed grouse, barred owl and blue-gray gnatcatcher.
- Criterion 6 - the area provided nesting habitat for two regionally rare avian species: the red-shouldered hawk and the norther goshawk.²⁸

1983 – A Geotechnical survey described the soils types and thus gave a clear indication of some of the natural history of the area. The first thing that was evident was a sandy silty clay till which is very hard and dense. Standing water persists for long periods of time in some wet sites which may correspond to depressions in the underlying till. Even when active, it is unlikely given the soils and drainage conditions, that the



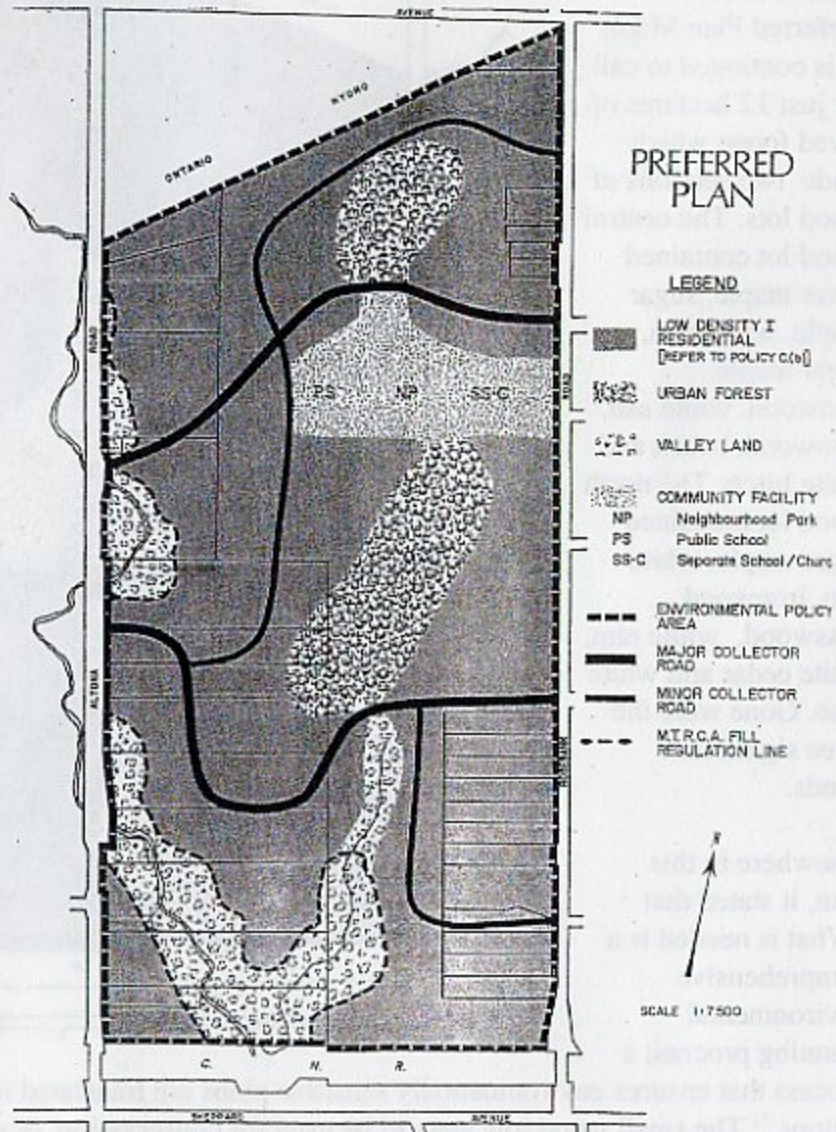
²⁷ The Bay News, To Save Altona Forest Pickering wants provincial help, Dec. 19, 1990

²⁸ Biophysical Resource Assessment for Bramalea Highbush Subdivision, Dec. 17, 1993

area constituted a highly viable agricultural site.²⁹ This description, along with the multitude of rocks showing themselves at the surface, would explain the fact that the area was not the best for agriculture and may be the reason Altona Forest was allowed to revert back to a forest and thus become an ecologically significant area warranting it being saved from development.

Prior to April 1988 – Prior to this date the plan for Altona Forest was included in the Highbush Community Plan. This plan called for the total destruction of Altona Forest with the exception of valley lands which already fell under the authority of the MTRCA and could not be developed. (See map)

April 1988 – A “Preferred” Plan of land use in the Altona Forest was presented to the Town of Pickering Council meeting. (See Preferred Plan Map) One of the stated objectives of this plan was “to establish two public urban forests that encompass the environmentally significant wood lots – one located centrally and having a minimum area of 8 hectares (20 acres), and one located northerly and having a minimum area of 4 hectares (10 acres).³⁰ These 4 and 8 hectare wood lots were to be the only remnants of Altona Forest. The central wood lot contained black cherry, sugar maple, white ash, ironwood, basswood, beech, white birch, white cedar and white pine along with a marsh containing three ponds. The marsh area was a significant area of the forest. The north wood lot



On the Pickering Preferred Plan most of Altona Forest would be destroyed.

²⁹ Soil-Engineering Study, 1983

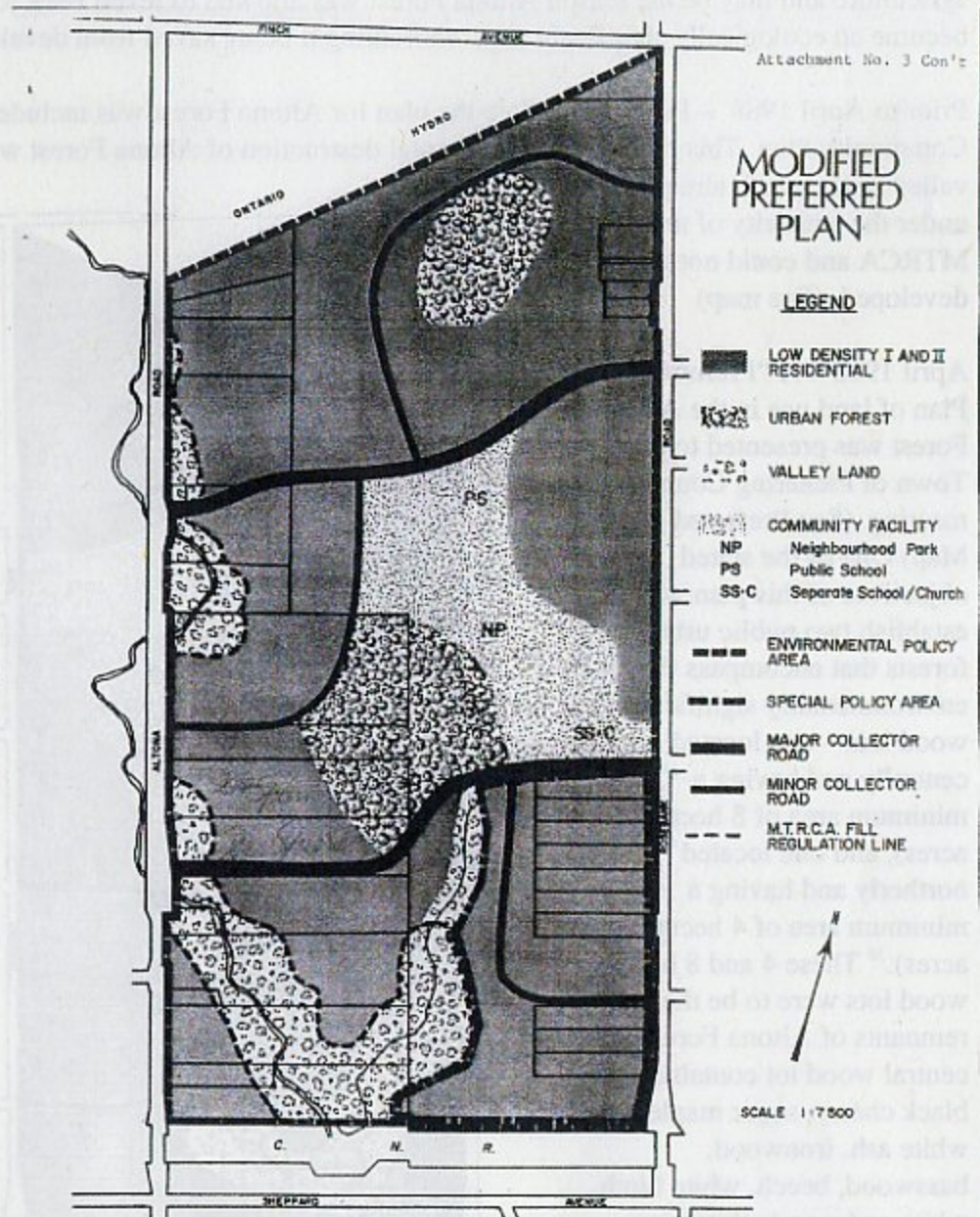
³⁰ Information Package for Public Open House on May 4th, 1989 p i

contained sugar maple, white elm, basswood, ironwood, hemlock and white cedar. Needless to say, the plan caused quite a stir in the community.

At this meeting the "Modified Preferred" Land Use Plan was also presented for comment. (See Preferred Plan Map). This continued to call for just 12 hectares of saved forest which made two sections of wood lots. The central wood lot contained silver maple, sugar maple, white elm, sugar maple, ironwood, white ash, basswood, beech and white birch. The north wood lot contained sugar maple, white elm, ironwood, basswood, white elm, white cedar and white pine. Gone were the three significant ponds.

Elsewhere in this plan, it stated that "What is needed is a comprehensive environmental planning process; a process that ensures environmentally sensitive plans are translated into environmental sensitive actions.³¹ The small wood lots were to be used for conservation, education and passive recreation. Environmentalists were not happy.

May 31, 1988 – Green Acres Estates environmental impact analysis was completed. This development was to take place in Lot 32 just north of the CNR railroad tracks. The property



³¹Information Package for Public Open House on May 4th, 1989 p 1

included some of Petticoat Creek valley lands just south of Altona Forest. Its objective was: To maintain as much as possible of the natural integrity of the Petticoat Creek and related valley lands and other natural functions by planning on the basis of ecological principals.³² The valley land of Petticoat Creek, including that inside Altona Forest, was already designated as Open Space Hazard Land because of Hurricane Hazel in 1954. In reference to the prospective development land, it was reported that, like so much property in the area, "The lands in question are providing no financial return to the proponent (owner). The proponent is seeking a reasonable return on investment all within the terms of reference for development."³³

The area was flat and sparsely vegetated. The contractor took no action on the valley slopes and built the homes, which were on the plan, once it was approved by the Town of Pickering. A very interesting recommendation in the study which showed some foresight was:

*Human activity should be concentrated into a narrow corridor where action can be taken to "raise" the carrying capacity and encourage plants having higher tolerances to human activity. A pathway through the valley should be considered by the Town of Pickering or the M.T.R.C.A. The walkway would direct pedestrian traffic away from more sensitive features and provide definite access points to the valley.*³⁴

As of 2008, no trail in that area of Petticoat Creek has been established.

May 4, 1989 – A public open house was held to discuss the Land Use Study of Altona Forest.³⁵ One interesting map in this document showed the ownership lines and it became very clear that the developers owned the vast majority of the Forest with some homes on Rosebank and larger private tracts on Altona Road. Many of these residents were anxious to subdivide and sell all or some of their property to the developers.

Dr. J. Murray Speirs was not happy with the token wood lots in the Town of Pickering's plans. "A forest is more than a collection of trees. It is a living community with flowers, and ponds with singing frogs and fairy shrimps and a multitude of creatures large and small, something new and wonderful with each passing season. Let us preserve as much of Altona Forest as we can."³⁶

³² Green Acres Estates Environmental Impact Analysis, prepared for Grant Morris by Henry Kortekaas & Associates Inc., Landscape Architects, May 31 1988

³³ Green Acres Estates Environmental Impact Analysis, prepared for Grant Morris by Henry Kortekaas & Associates Inc., Landscape Architects, May 31 1988

³⁴ Green Acres Estates Environmental Impact Analysis, prepared for Grant Morris by Henry Kortekaas & Associates Inc., Landscape Architects, May 31 1988

³⁵ Information Package for Public Open House on May 4th, 1989

³⁶ Pickering News Advertiser, Editorial – Stop the sacrifice, Oct. 31, 1990 p. 6-A

June 6, 1989 – Pickering Town planners presented a draft proposal to Council for the Altona Forest lands, which was discussed at the May 4th meeting. This plan included low density housing, two schools, a park, open space areas and an urban forest which still totalled only 12 hectares. Regional Councillor Doug Dickerson, who chaired the meeting, said the price tag may reach as high as \$15 million for part of the forested area.(the 12 hectares)” He added that “We must get innovative with the funding.”³⁷ The proposal was accepted in principle.

June 23, 1989 – Pickering Council vetoed suggestions that local environmental experts participate in a study of the Altona Forest area. Instead, an outside environmental consultant was to be hired to evaluate proposed land uses based on the Town’s planning report passed on June 6. Dr. Ron Orenstein of the International Wildlife Coalition suggested that area resident Dr. Murray Speirs assist the town in defining terms of reference because “nobody has more information on the ecological requirements of the Altona Forest.” Dale Hoy, president-elect of Pickering Naturalists volunteered his group to assist as well. Councillor Maurice Brenner urged that offers of help be accepted but council voted against it. Katherine Murray of the Rougemount Drive North Ratepayers’ Association urged the council to “give the area as much study as possible.” Mayor Arthurs said that, should the consultant recommend no development occur within the area, (very unlikely) the “The town will evaluate the situation again. We have to recognize the property is in private ownership – we’re not developing the property. It will be up to the landowner. We’ll only be recommending something to the region, although the town will make a decision on how to handle the report.”³⁸ This double talk left little doubt of what was to take place in Altona Forest.

July 5, 1989 – As the issue of Altona Forest became more public, letters to the editor of the local newspapers were getting more common. Lloyd Thomas, President, Whitevale and District Residents Association, wrote a letter to Mayor Wayne Arthurs and a copy to the News Advertiser which they published. In part it said

“We cannot continue to destroy the forest, the farmland, the creeks or the bogs without paying the price. The Altona Forest is one of the most sacred areas of Pickering. Once those lands are gone, they are gone forever.” He argued that the destruction of Altona Forest would “open to all developers, all the lands in Pickering; the farmlands, Duffin’s Creek, the hamlets. Nothing will be left protected.” He went on to give reasons for preserving the forest and concluded with, “The residents of Whitevale and district urge you to allow for a full environmental study of the

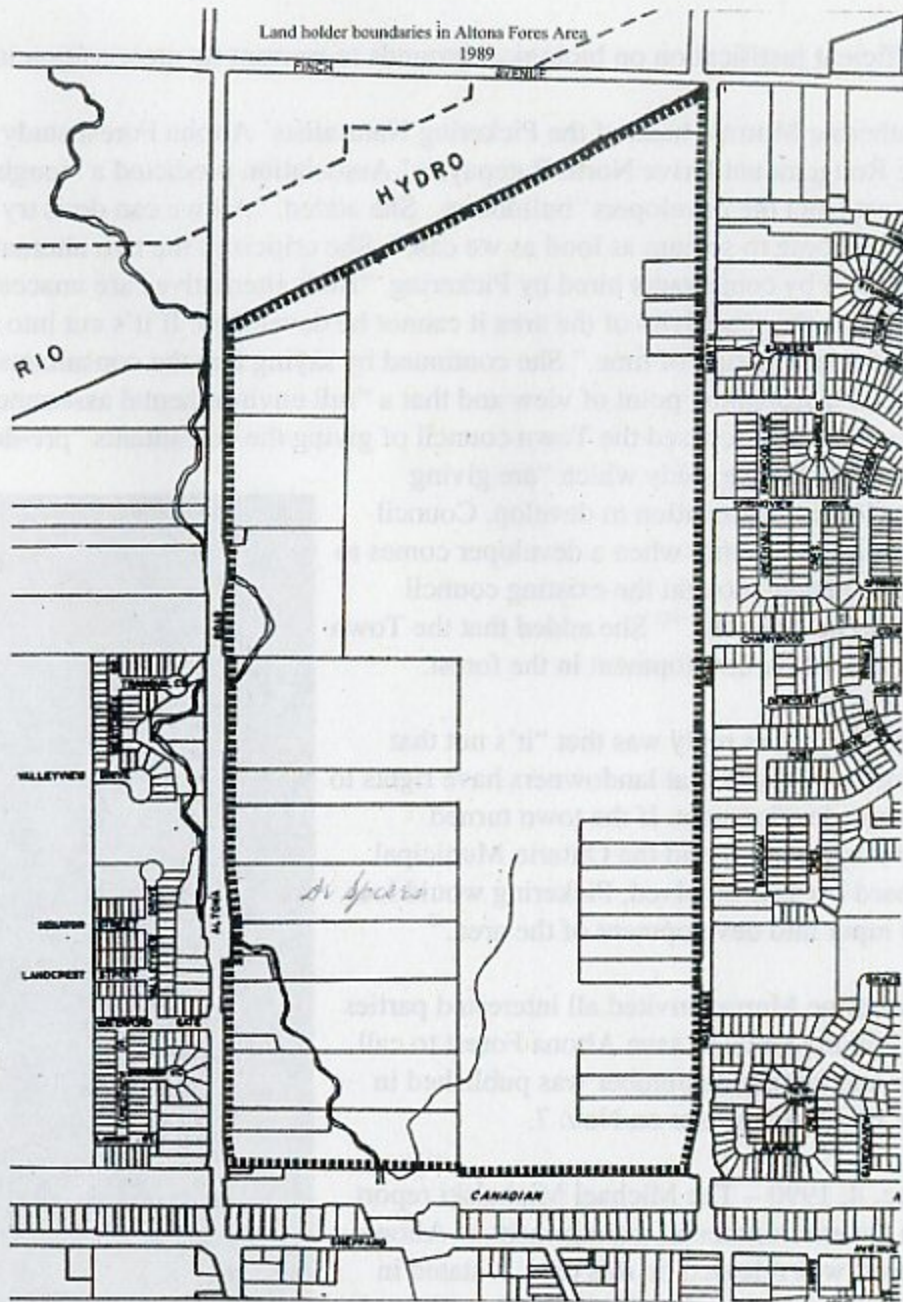
³⁷The Bay News, **Study fate of Altona Forest**, June 14, 1989 p. 23

³⁸Pickering News Advertiser, **Consultant to be hired as Altona Building is on horizon**, June 23, 1989 p. 3

*Altona Forest.*³⁹

Nov. 1990 – The Friends of the Altona Forest was established. Katherine Murray, a Pickering naturalist and member of the Rouge Park committee, was one of the organizers. This group started working on ways to save the Forest or as much of it as possible.

Nov. 7, 1990 – An open house was held on this date to present the draft Phase 1 report from Michael Michalski Associates, and to discuss the implications of the results on the recommended Land Use Plan for the Altona Forest study area. The study recognized the environmental significance of the site and concluded that, although insufficient funds were available for the town to acquire the entire 130 ha tract, a minimum of 12 ha of the forest should be



conserved.⁴⁰ No change from the Town of Pickering's stated stance of developing most of the forest. This observation was in direct opposition to a later statement in the report which stated "The results of the field investigation conducted as part of this study confirm the significance of the entire Altona Forest study area (excluding peripheral developed properties), and that there is

³⁹ Pickering News Advertiser, Letter to the Editor: Altona Forest for the people, July 5, 1989

⁴⁰ The Altona Forest Area Environmental Management Study Phase 1 Report, Michael Michalski Associates Simcoe Engineering Ltd., Dec. 1990

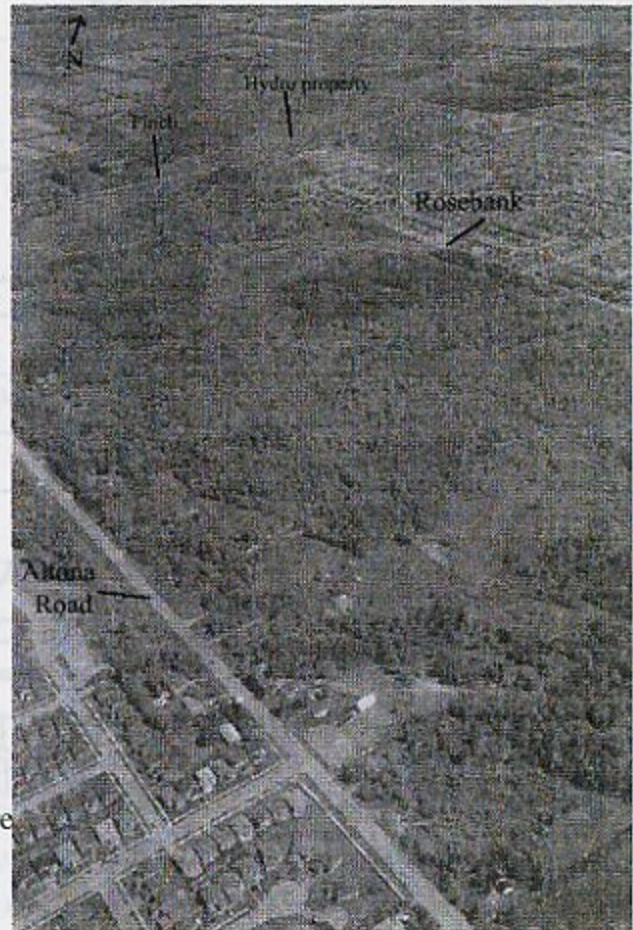
sufficient justification on biological grounds to warrant its preservation in entirety.”⁴¹

Katherine Murray, head of the Pickering Naturalists' Altona Forest study group and president of the Rougemount Drive North Ratepayers' Association predicted a “tough fight” to save Altona Forest from the developers' bulldozers. She added, “All we can do is try our damndest to save it. We're going to scream as loud as we can.” She criticized the two alternatives for the forest as put forth by consultants hired by Pickering. “Both alternatives are unacceptable,” she said. “To maintain the sensitivity of the area it cannot be developed. If it's cut into portions, it will destroy itself over a period of time.” She continued by saying that the consultants only look at the forest from a landscaping point of view and that a “full environmental assessment of the site is needed.” She accused the Town council of giving the consultants “pre-determined” terms of reference for the study which “are giving developers justification to develop. Council feels it has to jump when a developer comes to town. People thought the existing council would be different.”⁴² She added that the Town should refuse development in the forest.

Mayor Arthurs reply was that “it's not that simple.” He said that landowners have rights to pursue development. If the town turned developers away and the Ontario Municipal Board became involved, Pickering would lose all input into development of the area.⁴³

Katherine Murray invited all interested parties to join the battle to save Altona Forest to call her and her phone number was published in the News Advertiser on Nov. 7.

Dec. 4, 1990 – The Michael Michalski report on the environmental management of Altona Forest was released on this date. It stated in part that the natural evolution of the Altona Forest vegetation formations displays characteristics of both the southern Carolinian deciduous and Great Lakes-St. Lawrence forest regions, which confirms its transitional or boundary



1990 aerial view of Altona Forest with its still intact forest and farm land.

⁴¹ The Altona Forest Area Environmental Management Study Phase 1 Report, Michael Michalski Associates Simcoe Engineering Ltd., Dec. 1990

⁴² Pickering News Advertiser, **Residents will fight to save Altona Forest**, Nov. 7, 1990 p 5-A

⁴³ Pickering News Advertiser, **Residents will fight to save Altona Forest**, Nov. 7, 1990 p 5-A

position with respect to these two major vegetation formations. Plants which are characteristic of the boreal forest regions of northern Ontario can also be found here.⁴⁴ It was also pointed out that Altona Forest is made up of:

- upland forest communities – uniform cover of white cedar; understorey included ferns, enchanter's nightshade, avens, red baneberry, false lily-of-the-valley, white snakeroot and dog-strangling vine.
- lowland forests – surface ponding in depressions which persist into summer; hardwood, hardwood-conifer to conifer upperstorey; trembling aspen, balsam poplar, green ash, silver maple, birch, eastern hemlock and white pine; lower storey includes poison ivy, highbush cranberry, willow, wild grape, Virginia creeper, wild currant, sedges and some ferns.
- secessional forest communities – some field openings with white cedar, white elm, trembling aspen, green ash and white pine with Scott's pine, apple and pear; lower storey of poison ivy, sumac, red osier dogwood, raspberry and common buckthorn.
- secessional forest-old field complexes – dense groves of white cedar, green ash, white elm and trembling aspen with understorey similar to secessional forest communities.
- wet meadow, marshes and thickets – occur in depressions with high water content and exhibit native hydrophytic plants such as elecampane, boneset, joe-pye-weed, sedges, rush, horsetail, bulrush, showy lady-slipper with green ash, white elm, white cedar, red osier dogwood and willow.
- old field communities – many samples of these communities with Canada goldenrod, tick-trefoil, strawberry, aster, milkweed, wild bergamot, cinquefoil, vetch, buttercup, St. John's wort, ox-eye daisy, black-eyed Susan, Queen Anne's lace, dog-strangling vine and yarrow.⁴⁵

The report covered many topics which were in other reports and are listed elsewhere in this history. One additional fact is about the species and reptiles and amphibians from Altona Forest. There were four species of snakes; garter, northern brown, red-bellied and milk; one turtle; midland painted, and ten species of amphibians; wood frog, leopard frog, green frog, gray tree frog, spring peeper, chorus frog, American toad, red-spotted newt, yellow-spotted salamander, and red-bellied salamander.⁴⁶

In the same report, the Ministry of Natural Resources was quoted as it classified Petticoat Creek

⁴⁴ The Altona Forest Area Environmental Management Study Phase 1 Report, Michael Michalski Associates Simcoe Engineering Ltd., Dec. 1990

⁴⁵ The Altona Forest Area Environmental Management Study Phase 1 Report, Michael Michalski Associates Simcoe Engineering Ltd., Dec. 1990

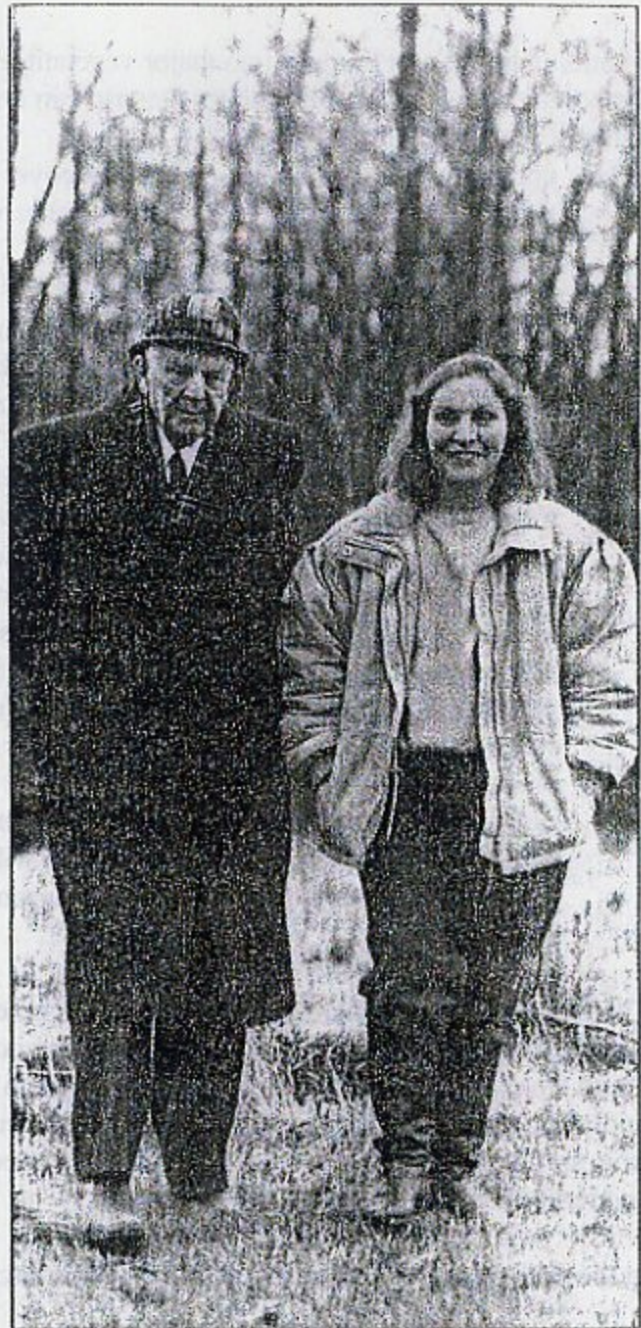
⁴⁶ The Altona Forest Area Environmental Management Study Phase 1 Report, Michael Michalski Associates Simcoe Engineering Ltd., Dec. 1990

as a warm water fishery supporting small forage fish.⁴⁷

Dec. 12, 1990 – At a public meeting the Pickering Council considered a plan to set aside about 40 acres of valley lands (most of which was protected under the Conservation Authority mandates) while developing the rest of Altona Forest. The council decided to ask the province to consider an environmental assessment of the forest. This neither approved or rejected the planning report but did manage to save the forest temporarily by putting development on hold. Angered by the decision, Mayor Arthurs said it was a “non-decision. Calling the vote ‘politically motivated.’ Arthurs says councillors ‘abdicated their responsibility by not making a decision. They took no position; they want somebody else to make a decision for them.’”⁴⁸

Dec. 17, 1990 – Pickering Council heard arguments on both sides of the Altona Forest development question. Mayor Arthurs stated that “conservative estimates put a \$70 million price tag on the land.” To that, Glenn DeBaeremaeker of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists stated “you have to decide how much your future is worth.” Council eventually decided to ask the Minister of the Environment, Ruth Grier, about funds for the acquisition or management of Altona Forest. They also wanted Grier to respond within three months on the following points:

- review and comment on environmental issues within the forest as they relate to the *Greenlands Strategy Report* and the *Watershed Report*;
- Review and comment on the provinces’ interest in the forest:



JIM RUSSELL/TORONTO STAR
FRIENDS OF THE FOREST: Katherine Murray and Dr. J. Murray Speirs take a walk in the Pickering woods they want to preserve. Jan. 3, 1991 Toronto Star.

⁴⁷ The Altona Forest Area Environmental Management Study Phase 1 Report, Michael Michalski Associates Simcoe Engineering Ltd., Dec. 1990

⁴⁸ Pickering News Advertiser, *Altona is saved for now*, Dec. 14, 1990

- comment on the suitability of the environmental assessment process as it applies to the forest:
- and advise whether there are any provincial funds available for acquisition and management of the forest, and suggest further options open to the town.⁴⁹

Dec. 19, 1990 – At the next meeting of council, a number of changes were made to the request to the province. The most significant change was the deletion of any mention of an Environmental Assessment.

1991 – The Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) acknowledged that "the overall biodiversity of this area is rare in such close proximity to an urban centre."

Jan 3, 1991 – It was announced that Pickering Town Council asked Environment Minister Ruth Grier if the province wanted to acquire or manage Altona Forest. This request was based on the fact that the Altona Forest Environmental Study recommended the preservation of this 'biologically significant' forest.⁵⁰ Mayor Wayne Arthurs wanted an answer quickly or he wanted a plan to preserve 30 acres of forest and the development of the rest to proceed as soon as possible. Was this a ploy by Arthurs to force the province's hands or a way to transfer blame for the development of the forest onto them?

Feb. 20, 1991 – Rosebank tributary and all the dug drainage ditches overflowed after a major snow melt and heavy rain precipitation.⁵¹

March 10, 1991 – As discussion heated up about the fate of Altona Forest, Pickering's Mayor Wayne Arthurs stated that Pickering could not afford the now \$60,000,000 it would take to buy out the owners. Barry Kent MacKay of the Toronto Star was annoyed at Mr. Arthurs comments and stated "If we can't afford to protect the handiwork of nature, or God, let's consider the Altona Forest to be a vast machine, built at no cost, to perform certain functions. It's a mechanism that produces oxygen. It chugs away providing habitat for rare species of wildlife. It collects water, purifies it and pumps it into Petticoat Creek and Lake Ontario, ensuring good water quality and quantity, while helping to maintain fish habitat. This machine, better than any book or computer, teaches life sciences to university students and others. This machine is fuelled by sunlight as it pumps out fresh air and water, plus trees, flowers, songbirds and salamanders. It stores energy and produces no waste. It provides entertainment and recreation while enhancing nearby property values. It somehow manages, within its complex workings, to inspire and uplift people - not all people - but growing numbers. It provides a cooling mechanism in the heat of summer and adds distinction to the community, but only by dying, apparently, can it appease its

⁴⁹Pickering News Advertiser, **Town to ask province for financial advice on saving Altona**, Dec. 19, 1990 A-1

⁵⁰Toronto Star, **Pickering invites Grier to forest fight**, Jan. 3, 1991

⁵¹ Biophysical Resource Assessment for Bramalea Highbush Subdivision, Dec. 17, 1993

owners.”⁵²

May 23, 1991 – It was announced that discussions were taking place between the Durham Catholic School Board and Bramalea Ltd. for the purchase of a portion of its property for the building of a school. The property would be part the land designated as Altona Forest despite having very few trees. The public board also stated that it planned to build a school in the same area.⁵³ These announcements sparked much heated debate between the Town, local residents and the two school boards.

Spring, 1991 - Bob Johnson, curator of the amphibian and reptile department at the Toronto Zoo, working in cooperation with Dr. J. Murray Speirs, identified the wet areas of the Altona Forest, which at this time took up most of Lots 31 and 32. He found ten wet areas which included wet meadows, marshes and ponds. As of 2004, six of these are housing, two are greatly reduced by trenches which drain into storm sewers in residents backyards (identified by AFSC for remediation), one is still a wet meadow and one is the restored Lacey’s Pond. (See Map for locations of these wet areas.)

May 4, 1992 – More than 30 delegations presented at the Town Council meeting as representatives voted to return Altona Forest into their municipal planning process in September.⁵⁴

Summer 1992 – Bramalea completed its drainage ditches to drain much of the water in Altona Forest in preparation for construction. The ground water stations were installed to monitor the ground water and see when the area would be suitable for digging basements. One of the



Bob Johnson’s wet areas map clearing showing that four of the seven wet areas were in the housing development section.

⁵²Toronto Star, *We all out to know enough to safeguard Altona Forest*, Mar. 10, 1991

⁵³Toronto Star, *Gloves are off in fight over Altona Forest*, May 23, 1991 p. E7

⁵⁴The Bay News, *MLA advised Pickering change planning approach*, May 6, 1992 p. 2

drainage ditches is clearly seen on the 1993 aerial map. Another one, along Rosebank Tributary, is hidden by the upper storey of trees but evidence of it is preserved today in Altona Forest. This reduction of the surface and ground water was used by the Friends of Altona Forest to fight against development. They used the Michalski report to reinforce their position. "One of the most common impacts of land development is a lowering of local water tables, which in turn can affect the long term viability of the vegetation cover. For example, depending on species susceptibilities, changes in water tables can lead to mortality, poorer health, and / or shifts in plant species composition; such changes could also affect wildlife species."⁵⁵ This argument was used on a number of occasions and by 2006 as hemlock died and fell over in the forest, the call of "I told you so," rang out from environmentalists and concerned citizens. Action was demanded to stop the trend.

Sept. 16, 1992 – Ten people, mostly residents on Rosebank Road who wanted to upgrade their homes or sell part or all of their properties to developers, demanded that council move forward with the approvals for a subdivision in Altona Forest. Many cited reasons that a freeze on applications as well as zoning and severance problems, have stopped them from getting town water and sewer services. John Sopts of Rosebank Rd. said his family lives under "horrendous conditions" in a winterized cottage with a wet basement, rotting floors and squirrels in the walls. "Let us provide ourselves with decent living conditions," he said.⁵⁶ Another resident, Frank Albanese, said "Our properties are becoming dumps. In the name of humanity and justice, we need to have an immediate decision."⁵⁷ It was obvious that many of those present had the objective to "realize their investment in their own property." by selling part or all to developers.⁵⁸ One resident, pointing out that building houses provides jobs, asked "what is more important: saving a family that is on welfare by providing jobs, or saving a family of field mice?"⁵⁹

Also in attendance were Bramalea and Landford Acres Ltd. urging for a decision and Jim McCafferty from the Durham Region Catholic School Board. Absent were the environmentalists and Friends of Altona Forest who had made so many presentations to Council previously. It was obvious that they were not aware of the Rosebank residents plans to appear at this meeting.

Sept. 21, 1992 – Pickering Council, in a vote of 5-2, approved a 1,000 home subdivision in

⁵⁵ The Altona Forest Area Environmental Management Study Phase 1 Report, Michael Michalski Associates Simcoe Engineering Ltd., Dec. 1990

⁵⁶ Pickering News Advertiser, **Get on with Altona Forest development: area residents**, Sept. 16, 1992 p. A-1

⁵⁷ Pickering News Advertiser, **Development would end 'horrendous conditions'**, Sept. 16, 1992 p. A-4

⁵⁸ The Bay News, **Everybody asks Altona Forest area development go ahead**, Sept. 16, 1992

⁵⁹ The Bay News, **Everybody asks Altona Forest area development go ahead**, Sept. 16, 1992

Altona Forest area with a 47 acre 'urban forest' to be saved out of the 330 acres of the forest.^{60 61} This small 'urban forest' was slated to provide education and passive recreation.

The council chambers were packed for the debate and vote on this important issue, but only about four dozen people waited from 7:30 p.m. to 1:30 a.m. on Tuesday to hear the decision. Over 40 delegations spoke on the issue including Katherine Murray of Friends of Altona Forest who said that town planners had mislead council when they said that no new information had been received about the forest since December 1990. She pointed out a number of provincial reviews which affect the forest and that Natural Resources Ministry staff have argued for preservation of the area as a forest corridor between Rouge and Duffin's creeks and ultimately the Oak Ridges Moraine. Steve Marshall, of Save the Rouge, told council that Altona Forest and the Rouge were connected and partially dependant on each other. He stated that many other municipalities are trying to restore forested areas which they destroyed and Pickering should not destroy such as resource.⁶²

Janet Foster, MTRCA, also made a submission and stated that the Authority had an alternate development plan that would keep the sensitive part of the forest intact. She also announced that the MTRCA was looking whether it had any funds available to preserve the forest but all this was still in the future and she didn't know how long it would take.

Opposed to the subdivision plan were Councillors Van Kempen and Brenner.

After the meeting, Katherine Murray told the newspaper reporters, "This is just the beginning. There are lots of hurdles to go (before development proceeds)."⁶³ She had urged the council to put development plans on hold so that the provincial government could finish considering an environmental assessment of the area.

Soon after this meeting, A. Michael Kundu, Board of Directors for the Friends of the Altona Forest and Petticoat Creek, sent a scathing letter to the News Advertiser which was published on Oct. 19, 1992. In it, Mr. Kundu accused the council of "dedication to tearing the heart out of the remaining wild spaces in Pickering. As sad as it was, it certainly was not unexpected." and "in a provincial perspective, this town's leaders are known to be ecologically ignorant. While the majority of Canadian leaders are seeking to preserve regions of environmental importance, Wayne Arthurs and some council members are so in fond of development that they are literally, 'feeding out of the hands of developers'".⁶⁴ The lines were firmly established for this fight for

⁶⁰Pickering News Advertiser, **Altona swap flops**, Oct. 11, 1992 p. 14

⁶¹Pickering News Advertiser, **Pickering to ask for Altona Forest land exchange**, Oct. 2, 1992 p 4

⁶²The Bay News, **Pickering councillors approve development of forests**, Sept. 23, 1992 p. 1

⁶³Pickering News Advertiser, **Death knell ringing for Altona Forest**, Sept. 23, 1992 p. A-1

⁶⁴Pickering News Advertiser, **Letter to the Editor - Town misses the grade on environmental preservation**, Oct. 19, 1992 p 6

Altona Forest. On one side were the developers looking to make a great deal of money, Altona Forest residents who wanted their properties to turn a profit and some town politicians while on the other side were Pickering environmentalists, many residents and some town politicians.

Oct. 2, 1992 – Pickering Town Council considered asking the province to explore a possible land swap with developers who own the Altona Forest. Councillor Kip Van Kempen and Councillor Maurice Brenner, both of whom opposed development in Altona Forest, encouraged the land swap as a cost effective way of saving the forest.⁶⁵

Oct. 11, 1992 – The politicians decided to proceed with their request to the province to look at a land swap with developers who owned Altona Forest, but only in regard to the ‘urban forest’ already slated for preservation. Councillor Maurice Brenner said that the decision “does nothing for the environment.” He and councillor Kip Van Kempen wanted a land swap that would preserve all the forest lands considered as environmentally significant. Van Kempen said that “If there is a better area for the homes proposed in the forest, we owe it to the people of Pickering to find it if we have any feeling for conservation whatsoever.”



Trout lily.

Councillor Doug Wellman wanted only the suggested 47 acre “urban forest” to be considered for a land swap as he expressed his feelings that too much revenue will be lost to the Town of Pickering if the Altona Forest development doesn’t go through. Mayor Wayne Arthurs came out against the land swap saying “If we want the province to jerk us around another two years, this (request) will achieve that.”

At this time, Bramalea Ltd. was the major landowner in the forest, with Landford Construction owning 18 acres. The provincial land swap for the now 19 acres proposed for “urban forest” would mean that the Town would not have to compensate the developers by allowing them to build higher-density homes elsewhere on the Altona Forest site.⁶⁶



Canada thistle

Oct. 12, 1992 – The Pickering Post published an article by Michael Rundu explaining the vast ecologically important reasons for saving Altona Forest. This article is an excellent early summary of why so many people felt so strongly about Altona Forest. (See Appendix B for a copy of the article.)⁶⁷ It was at this time that developers were joining forces with local trade unions, labour groups and builder’s associations to put pressure on Town Council to permit the planned developments to proceed. The conflict was intensifying.

⁶⁵Pickering News Advertiser, **Pickering to ask for Altona Forest land exchange**, Oct. 2, 1992 p 4

⁶⁶Pickering News Advertiser, **Altona swap flops**, Oct. 11, 1992 p. 14

⁶⁷Pickering Post, **The Rouge - Duffin Corridor is The Altona Forest**, by Michael Rundu, Oct. 12, 1992 p 1

Dec. 18, 1992 – The Town confirmed that it had received development applications for three quarters of the 330 acre Altona Forest. Planners started to work on road patterns and the environmental management study for the small wood lots.⁶⁸

Oct. 1993 – The natural history of the land is as important as the human history. In fact, the natural history often dictates how people react and interact with the land. That is the case in Altona Forest. A Geology and Surficial Geology study was conducted in the Altona Forest area. The report pointed out that the area is within the Iroquois Plain physiographic region, which represents that portion of the Lake Ontario basin which was inundated by glacial meltwater during the recession of the Wisconsin Ice sheet some 12,000 years ago. The shoreline of ancient Lake Iroquois is located to the north near Concession 3. The Iroquois Plain consists of land inundated by the glacial lake which formed following the retreat of the Lake Ontario ice lobe. The shoreline (north of Altona Forest) is composed of beach sands and gravels. The slope of the Iroquois lake bed is relatively subdued due to the combination of smoothing of the glacial till by wave action and the infilling of depressions by sediments.⁶⁹ This explains why Altona Forest has such a gentle slope from north to south. Test holes were drilled in the Altona Forest area with the following results:

- bedrock was not encountered in any of the drilling (deepest hole 16.8 metres; 55 feet) nor does it outcrop near the site.
- underlying bedrock formation is blue-grey shale formed during the Upper Ordovician Period and is part of the Blue Mountain Formation.
- the majority of the site is underlain by a dense glacial till, generally encountered within 60 cm of the surface in most forested areas, that pre-dates glacial Lake Iroquois and is known as the Halton Till. The till is very dense and compact allowing very little water to percolate down or flow through except in some fractures which are not more than 2 m below the surface.
- organic soils were found only around more-or-less permanent ponds ⁷⁰(3 in the present area of Altona Forest and 4 more in the portion which was developed.)

These observations confirm that the topsoil is thin and the underlying till is hard and prevents the roots of trees from sinking deeply into the ground. Water has difficulty being absorbed into the water table but runs off slowly due to the gentle slope of the land. The soils in the area are silts and clays with some loams or clay loams and not very good for successful agriculture in most areas.

⁶⁸Pickering News Advertiser, **Altona Forest development a step closer**, Dec. 18, 1992

⁶⁹The Altona Forest Area Environmental Management Study Phase 1 Report, Michael Michalski Associates Simcoe Engineering Ltd., Dec. 1990

⁷⁰Hydrogeology of the Bramalea Highbush Subdivision, Oct. 1993



Ground water was also addressed in this report:

- Groundwater flows occur at a relatively shallow depth along predominantly horizontal fractures in the underlying till.
- The underlying till prevents rapid percolation (vertical) movement of water leading to saturation of the surface material;
- Due to the low gradients and depressional areas (horizontal), water tends to collect, creating spring or vernal pools;
- Surface pools and shallow groundwater layers are perched systems overlying or in the upper layers of the till;

- The shallow perched groundwater system does provide some seepage discharge to Petticoat Creek via shallow fractures in the till.⁷¹

Feb. 12, 1993 – It was announced today by Pickering Regional Councillor Kip Van Kempen, that the Provincial government was close to making a commitment of \$10 million to save a part of Altona Forest from development. The Town and Pickering and Region of Durham were expected to contribute around \$1 million to the project. When Katherine Murray of The Friends of Altona Forest was told of the decision her reaction was “What? Oh my God. Holy jumping. Wow! What a shock. Wow! I don’t know what to say. I’m speechless.”⁷²

March 1, 1993 (week of) – MTRCA adopted the proposed Altona Forest provincial purchase plan as an acquisition project.⁷³

March 8, 1993 – Pickering Council approved the road pattern plan for the development of Altona Forest. Regional Councillors Kip Van Kempen, Maurice Brenner and local Councillor Eileen Higdon voted against the scheme. The road pattern calls for three north / south roadways through the Altona Forest area which would allow landowners to develop their properties independently from each other⁷⁴ and the developers to build nearly 1000 homes.

April 7, 1993 – It was reported that Councillor Doug Wellman wrote to the Provincial cabinet suggesting the Province can’t afford the \$10 million to save part of Altona Forest. In the letter, Councillor Wellman stated “Frankly, the Town needs the levies of this development to meet its future financial obligations,” and “Then, there is the (issue of) ongoing management of the property. It already is used as a dumping ground, haven for teenage parties and dirt bike competitions.” and further that the provincial government has “done more than its share of land conservation in Pickering.” He went on to insult the Ministry of Natural resources and MTRCA staff, who have reported on the environmental significance of the site, as “young, idealistic biologists who can find noble reason to protect every species of flower and vegetation everywhere.”⁷⁵ The letter angered Councillor Kip Van Kempen, who sat on the MTRCA board and who made the announcement of the \$10 million provincial support. He wrote a memo to Mr. Wellman stating “It will be unforgivable if your actions, in the absence of public debate, hurt our chances of this gift from the Province. I am



May apple.

⁷¹ Biophysical Resource Assessment for Bramalea Highbush Subdivision, Dec. 17, 1993

⁷² Pickering News Advertiser, **Province may save Altona Forest**, Feb. 12, 1993 p. 1

⁷³ The Bay News, **Altona Forest road plans approved despite preservation proposal**, March 10, 1993 p. 3

⁷⁴ The Bay News, **Altona Forest road plans approved despite preservation proposal**, March 10, 1993 p. 3

⁷⁵ Pickering News Advertiser, **Councillor Wellman flip flops on preserving Altona Forest**, Wed. April 3, 1993 p. 3-

livid.”⁷⁶ Long time supporter of saving Altona Forest, Katherine Murray of Friends of the Altona Forest, called Mr. Wellman’s letter “silly. That’s his opinion; it’s outdated. It’s probably dated about 1953.”⁷⁷ While all this was going on, the Town of Pickering was proceeding with development applications waiting for a final decision from the province re funding etc..

When the letter was leaked to the residents’ groups and the press, Mr. Wellman softened his position, saying he would support the preservation of the forest if “wrinkles” were worked out.

April 11, 1993 – In an interview with the Pickering News Advertiser, Councillor Kip Van Kempen relayed that the council would soon meet to discuss the suggested provincial \$10 million acquisition of 160 acres of the 330 acre Altona Forest. He felt that the proposed deal with Bramalea Ltd. could fall through unless Pickering gave its approval. The deal was arranged with Councillor Van Kempen and Mayor Arthurs met with the Premier on April 7th. The MTRCA would receive the money which in turn they would use to purchase the site. Additional funding was to be requested from the Town of Pickering and the Region of Durham.⁷⁸

April 14, 1993 – Ward 1 Local Councillor Doug Wellman, in an interview in The Bay News, criticized fellow councillor Kip Van Kempen for his alleged “refusal to work with his colleagues” and said that his use of the media to make announcements before they go to Council “may be jeopardizing a deal to acquire Pickering’s Altona Forest.” and “He’s our MTRCA representative and he doesn’t work with us,” and further “if Van Kempen is ‘going to put a gun to everyone’s head’ by asking for support without providing all of the information then ‘I don’t see how council can support the thing.’”⁷⁹ In response Van Kempen assured The Bay News that “he’ll proceed slowly and cautiously in an effort to gain support for the plan from council.” He also stated that the issue was discussed at a previous meeting and more information would be provided to Council at the next meeting.⁸⁰

April 18, 1993 – The Ontario Municipal Board approved the plans to preserve a part of the Altona Forest. Under the terms of the approval, the MTRCA and the provincial Ministry of Natural Resources had two years to purchase the approximately 66 hectares (163 acres) of forest to be protected.⁸¹

April 19, 1993 – The Town of Pickering Council met to vote on the \$10 million acquisition of

⁷⁶Pickering News Advertiser, **Councillor Wellman flip flops on preserving Altona Forest**, Wed. April 3, 1993 p. 3-

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⁷⁷Pickering News Advertiser, **Councillor Wellman flip flops on preserving Altona Forest**, Wed. April 3, 1993 p. 3-

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⁷⁸Pickering News Advertiser, **Altona Forest fate in limbo**, April 11, 1993 p. 1

⁷⁹The Bay News, **Council “in dark” regarding Altona Forest plan: Wellman**, April 14, 1993 p 5

⁸⁰The Bay News, **Council “in dark” regarding Altona Forest plan: Wellman**, April 14, 1993 p 5

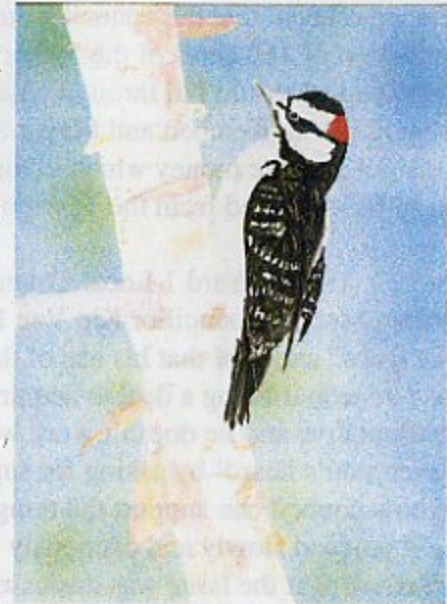
⁸¹Pickering News Advertiser, **Altona Forest mix of homes, green space**, April 18, 1993 p. 1

160 acres of Altona Forest for a preserve.⁸²

Steve Marshall of Save the Rouge Valley System said the ecological importance of the Altona Forest “is not just a Pickering issue . . . The Province has offered you a gift. Would you dare turn this down?”⁸³

“We applaud the efforts and offer our congratulations to all involved,” said Katherine Murray of Friends of the Altona Forest prior to the vote.⁸⁴

The proposal was approved unanimously, however, people who owned small parcels of property in the area to be acquired retained rights to development if the government failed to come forth with additional funds to purchase their properties. Council agreed that if the individual properties were not purchased before the deal went to the Ontario Municipal board that the owners would retain residential zoning on their properties to protect their property values. Councillor Rick Johnson complained that “the little guy got left out” but Councillor Van Kempen argued that developers were compensated first because they owned 110 of the 130 acres to be protected. He told Council and those present, that the Metro Toronto and Region Conservation Authority was committed to raising the money to compensate smaller landowners.⁸⁵



Only Councillor Maurice Brenner opposed the clause retaining residential zoning in the forest, arguing that “it makes a scam of the whole process. If you support the acquisition, you’ve got to support it to the end.”

Later at the same meeting, Council approved plans for a 591-home Bramalea subdivision, to be built in an area of the forest not designated for protection.⁸⁶ Community groups continued to oppose the planned development and made plans to present their objections at the Ontario Municipal Board.

April 23, 1993 – MTRCA held a meeting to approve the purchase of part of Altona Forest when

⁸²Pickering News Advertiser, **Altona Forest fate in limbo**, April 11, 1993 p. 1

⁸³Pickering News Advertiser, **Altona Forest preservation wins Town OK**, April 21, 1993

⁸⁴Pickering News Advertiser, **Altona Forest preservation wins Town OK**, April 21, 1993

⁸⁵Pickering News Advertiser, **Altona paperwork approved**, April 21, 1993

⁸⁶Pickering News Advertiser, **Altona paperwork approved**, April 21, 1993

the \$10 million was received from the province.⁸⁷

July 21, 1993 – A multi-million dollar deal to save the Altona Forest from becoming a subdivision was approved by Queen's Park. The news was confirmed in a letter to the Town of Pickering from the MTRCA. It was also announced that the Town of Pickering was going to be asked for a contribution to help raise the \$10 million grant to the needed \$13.8 million to acquire the properties. "It's going to be tough," predicted Pickering Councillor Kip Van Kempen, a member of the MTRCA board. "People are going to be looking to Pickering to set the pace. It will make for good debate if someone suggests Pickering shouldn't contribute anything." In an earlier report, Town treasurer Jim Walls, suggested Pickering contribute \$400,000 in two installments, to be paid in 1996 and 1997. But a contribution "won't mean a tax increase," promised Mayor Wayne Arthurs. "Definitely not." The Town has funds for parkland acquisition in a reserve account, but they are not specifically earmarked for the Altona Forest.⁸⁸

Sept. 16, 1993 – At a press conference in Altona Forest, Howard Hampton, Natural Resources Minister in the NDP government, announced that it would give \$10 million to purchase 53 hectares (131 acres) of interior Altona Forest in an effort to protect it. (13 hectares of Petticoat Creek valley lands were dedicated as part of the purchase). Durham West MPP Jim Wiseman and MTRCA Chairman Bill Granger were also in attendance. It was announced that the MTRCA will "hold title to" and manage the lands. Mr. Granger said, "We believe this is a wonderful location for people to enjoy nature right on their doorstep. We're very strongly committed to preserving this forest as an intact ecosystem." He later said that trails could likely be introduced at some point and that the Conservation Foundation of Greater Toronto, a fundraising arm of the MTRCA, was working toward acquiring four hectares of property known as the Speirs wood lot, located in the southwest corner of the Altona Forest.⁸⁹

The MTRCA was tasked with raising additional money from the federal and regional governments and Pickering to purchase some of the surrounding properties.

Katherine Murray's response to the news was "It's superb: we're very happy. We're getting much closer to our original goal, which is protection of the entire forest. It's like an original painting," she said. "If you offer to purchase an original Rembrandt, you don't purchase just half." She added that environmentalists will keep fighting to preserve the entire forest.⁹⁰ Dr. Speirs' dream of Altona Forest as a sanctuary for wildlife was a huge step closer. The Friends of Altona Forest remained concerned about potential impacts from development surrounding the forest.

⁸⁷Pickering News Advertiser, **Altona Forest fate in limbo**, April 11, 1993 p. 1

⁸⁸Pickering News Advertiser, **Altona Forest to be saved**, July 21, 1993 p 5-A

⁸⁹The Bay News, **Altona is a done deal**, Sept. 22, 1993

⁹⁰Pickering News Advertiser, **Altona Forest to stay green**, Sept.19, 1993 p 1



Petticoat Creek near the parking lot in winter.

Nov. 8, 1993 – In a surprise vote, Pickering Town Council did not approve changing the district development plans for Altona Forest to reflect the provincial acquisition of a part of Altona Forest. The vote left in tact the original plan which called for a very small ‘urban forest’ and housing in most of the forest. The vote was a result of Councillor Rick Johnson lambasting of Queen’s Park for giving money for the developers but not for the resident landowners who still want a financial offer. Mr. Johnson said that “They bailed out the big developers – this is great – and let the poor little guy come (complaining) to council.” Councillor Kip Van Kempen once again pointed out that the developers were dealt with first because they owned the most property. The MTRCA was looking for another \$3.8 million from other sources including the Town of Pickering and the Region of Durham, to finish off the acquisition of land and for other expenses. He defended the Authority’s handling of the situation. Pickering deputy director of planning, Tom Melymuk, pointed out that the modifications to the district plan would have eliminated many of the issues that concerned local parties intended to bring before the OMB.⁹¹ This left the whole process in a state of confusion but it was a common belief that the issue would be discussed again at the next meeting.

⁹¹Pickering News Advertiser, Altona Forest paperwork refused, Nov. 14, 1993 p. 8

Nov. 15, 1993 – Paperwork reflecting provincial acquisition of the environmentally significant Altona Forest was finally approved at a council meeting. A provision to allow private landowners rights to develop if the government did not buy them out was also passed. Councillor Maurice Brenner opposed this clause saying the council should support the provincial plan to the end. At the same meeting, plans for a 591 home Bramalea subdivision, to be built in an area of the forest not designated for protection, was reaffirmed by council. Community groups continued to protest and promised to fight this development at the Ontario Municipal Board.⁹²

Dec. 13, 1993 – With a request for \$1.25 million from the MTRCA up for vote, Ward 2 Regional Councillor Kip Van Kempen, suggested a \$834,000 amount paid over four years for the land purchases involved in saving Altona Forest. Mayor Arthurs' opposition was displayed in his statement that "I feel no particular obligation to acquire additional property the Town has no interest in."⁹³ He later stated "I hope when all is said and done we will be seen as responsible partners in the project. I am prepared to assist in a modest way."⁹⁴ It was once again pointed out that the parkland reserve fund, money paid by developers in the form of cash in lieu for parkland, could be used as a source for the money. Ward 3 Regional Councillor Rick Johnson, reacted angrily towards the suggestion that the town contribute money to the proposed purchase, despite the money was reserved for just such purchases. He called the \$10 million provincial contribution to preserve Altona Forest a "political nightmare" and suggested the money could have been better spent on other environmentally-sensitive properties and community projects.⁹⁵

With majority support, including a reluctant Mr. Johnson, Pickering Council's executive committee decided to follow Town treasurer Jim Walls suggestion and fund \$400,000 toward the purchase of environmentally significant Altona Forest. The funds came from the Town's parkland reserve account so that no special funds were needed. They money was designated to buy specific parcels of property totalling 21 acres, owned by residents, to add to the preserve of Altona Forest.⁹⁶



Rosebank Tributary near entrance from St. Elizabeth Seton School.

⁹²Pickering News Advertiser, *Altona paperwork approved*, Nov. 17, 1993

⁹³Pickering News Advertiser, *Town council to debate spending on Altona Forest*, Dec. 14, 1993

⁹⁴The Bay News, *Town ready to give \$400,000 towards Altona Forest purchase*, Dec. 15, 1993

⁹⁵The Bay News, *Town ready to give \$400,000 towards Altona Forest purchase*, Dec. 15, 1993

⁹⁶Pickering News Advertiser, *Altona Forest funding approved*, Dec. 15, 1993 p. A-4

Dec. 20, 1993 – The recommendation from the executive committee for funding was brought before the whole council at their meeting on this Monday. Knowing that \$400,000 was already approved, the MTRCA asked for \$800,000 from the Town as they were trying to raise \$3.8 million needed to supplement the \$10 million from the government. Councillor Rick Johnson pointed out that this additional funding is earmarked by the MTRCA to purchase more land than Pickering had in mind for the Altona Forest and “and this would cut into land earmarked for development. There are services in there and land is ready to be developed.”⁹⁷ Of course it would cut into development land. That was the whole idea. The suggested \$400,000 was discussed. Craig Mather from the MTRCA argued for an increase to \$720,000 which he said would encourage Durham Region and private sources to make large contributions. He pointed out that the provincial government normally funds only 50% for such projects and the grant of \$10 million was unusual and showed the importance of the Altona Forest. “I don’t want anyone to think I want to pave everything over.” said Mr. Johnson. He added, “We’ve done our share to preserve green space. We have the Greenwood Conservation Area and the Claremont Conservation area.”⁹⁸ Mr. Van Kempen spoke about “doing our share” but eventually the recommendation of \$400,000 was passed.



Elecampane

Dec. 17, 1993 – Bramalea’s report on its revised development area, predominantly in Lot 31, states that “The majority of the proposed development area is old field/early secondary succession habitat in an abandoned agricultural setting. The more significant mature habitat areas have been preserved in the proposed Forest Preserve.”⁹⁹ Although technically true, they failed to mention that they, and another developer, owned much of the ‘abandoned’ agricultural land and that might have had an influence on it being no longer farmed. Also, a large section of the MTRCA’s environmentally sensitive area with three ponds and mature trees was included in their proposed development area.

Spring 1994 – Dr. J. Murray Speirs conducted another detailed territory mapping of breeding birds in Altona Forest. He used the data to compare with the results of similar studies in 1949 and 1950. He conducted further studies in 1995 and 1997 and with the help of Doug Lockrey, additional studies in 1999 and 2000.

⁹⁷Pickering News Advertiser, **Pickering caps forest contribution to \$400G**, Dec. 22, 1993 p. 5-A

⁹⁸Pickering News Advertiser, **Pickering caps forest contribution to \$400G**, Dec. 22, 1993 p. 5-A

⁹⁹ Biophysical Resource Assessment for Bramalea Highbush Subdivision, Dec. 17, 1993

April 9, 1994 – The Ontario Municipal Board approved the plans to preserve 66 hectares (163 acres) of Altona Forest and to allow the rest to be developed with low and medium-density housing. Not all the designated area was acquired, probably because of increased costs. “It’s a really positive decision for Pickering,” said Mr. Carroll, Pickering’s director of planning.¹⁰⁰



Deer print in mud in the north end of Altona Forest. A herd of about 12 deer roam the entire forest and north to Amos Ponds.

Altona Forest Urban Forest came into existence officially on this date. Altona Forest now included 131 acres or 52 hectares which represented 39.7% of the original forest. This was nowhere near the amount of environmentally sensitive area which the Friends of Altona Forest hoped to save, however considering the Pickering Preferred Plan called for just 9% of the forest to be saved, it was still a great victory for the environment and was recognized and celebrated as that.

Sept. 1994 – The Forest Edge Management Plan for the eastern boundary of Altona Forest was submitted to the Town of Pickering. The plan included fencing, access, hazard tree removal, grading, drainage and restoration planting.

Feb. 24, 1995 – MTRCA approves the purchase of 3.9 acres of the Dinardo property for \$687,580 (over \$176,000 per acre) plus \$18,000 in legal and planning costs¹⁰¹ pending conclusion of negotiations with the Dinardos.

March 29, 1995 – Negotiations for the purchase of 3.9 acres of the Dinardo property, continued between the MTRCA (represented by Don Prince) and Julie Albanese and her brother Louis Dinardo who owned 10 acres in the south portion of Altona Forest near the location of Strouds Lane and Altona Road.¹⁰²

June 23, 1995 – The Forest Management Agreement was finalized and amended on March 8, 1996. The agreement gave the Forest legal protection, “in perpetuity,” which prevents it from being turned into just another city park. The definition of “in perpetuity” was up for discussion in the years to come as members of Town and then City Council chose to define it as around 5 or 6 years. The actual definition is: “The quality or condition of being perpetual; time without end; eternity.”¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰Pickering News Advertiser, *Altona Forest mix of homes, green space*, April 10, 1994

¹⁰¹The Bay News, *Altona Forest project headache for landowner*, March 29, 1995 p. 8

¹⁰²The Bay News, *Altona Forest project headache for landowner*, March 29, 1995 p. 8

¹⁰³Answers.com at www.answers.com/topic/perpetuity

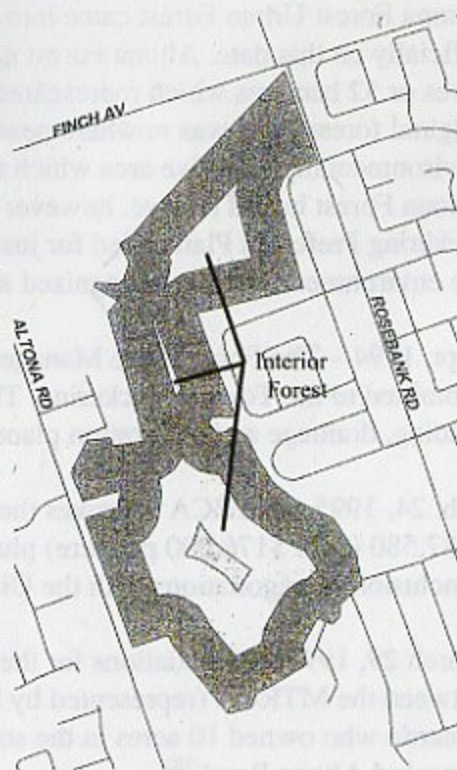
Sept. 15, 1995 – Luigi Dinardo, Giuliana Albanese and Concetta Dinardo transferred Parts 3 and 4 on 40R-16478 to The Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority for the sum of \$750,000. (A little more than originally approved by the TRCA.) This land acquisition completed the south portion of Altona Forest north of Strouds Lane.¹⁰⁴ The Dinardos sold their west side to Northstar for development while the east side became part of the J. Murray Speirs Ecological Reserve of Altona Forest.

March 29, 1996 – The Altona Forest Environment Management Plan was completed and included protection and restoration objectives for the forest. The main goal of the plan is to ensure the long-term protection of the ecological integrity of Altona Forest. The plan outlined acceptable recreational uses for Altona Forest. Passive and non-intrusive outdoor activities that are compatible with the natural environment are accepted (e.g. hiking, leashed dog walking, bird watching, wildlife photography). Active uses in the forest (e.g. mountain biking, camping, vehicular traffic, etc.) are not permitted. In order to minimize negative cumulative impacts through human disturbances, the management plan limits access to specified trails, as well as other provisions to protect vegetation and wildlife.¹⁰⁵ The report pointed out that Altona Forest has interior forest habitat and is part of the less than half of one percent of this type of wooded habitat remaining in the Greater Toronto Area. The specific goals of the Management Plan were listed as:(See Map of interior forest in Altona)

- I. To protect and maintain the Altona Forest Property
- II. To protect and maintain the natural ecosystem of the Altona Forest Property
- III. To establish and protect the J. Murray Speirs Ecological Reserve as a natural ecosystem for passive scientific and lay field studies.
- IV. To conserve the archaeological features and when appropriate allow investigative research and interpretation of these features.
- V. To promote opportunities for public education about natural heritage and appropriate public use in the Altona Forest Property that respect the use of the ecosystem.¹⁰⁶

May, 1996 – Dr. J. Murray Speirs (a well known ornithologist, retired University of Toronto

Interior Forest in Altona



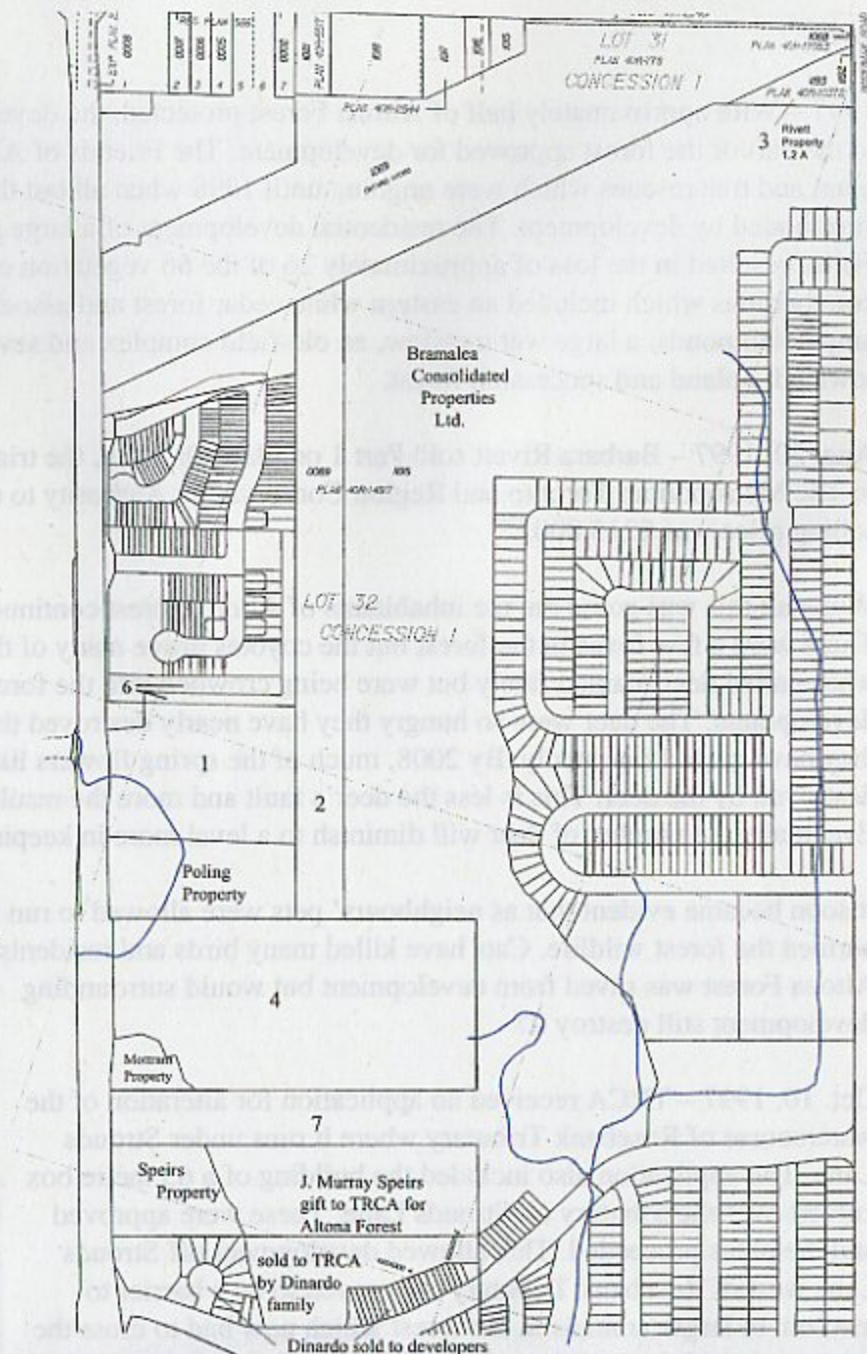
¹⁰⁴ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

¹⁰⁵ Altona Forest Community Newsletter, Sept. 1999, Vol. 1, No. 1

¹⁰⁶ Altona Forest Environmental Management Plan, MTRCA March 29, 1996

professor and future recipient of the Order of Canada) discussed the generous donation of a large portion of his own lands (2.8 hectares) to TRCA as part of a larger "ecological reserve" within the Altona Forest. Negotiations between Dr. Speirs and the TRCA resulted in the donated land becoming the heart of the approximately 10 hectare J. Murray Speirs Ecological Reserve which is not open to the public and is used for passive scientific field studies by environmental scientists.

June 6, 1996 – Dr. John Murray Speirs and his niece, Rosemary Speirs, transferred parts 2 and 3 on 40R-16568 to The Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and thus connect the Dinardo property to the rest of Altona Forest, for the sum of \$2. Considering what other landowners received for their property, this 'gift' was indeed generous and in keeping with Dr. Speirs love and dedication to the environment and his life long interest in birds which now could continue to visit Altona Forest in great numbers in safety. It was in his honour, that the J. Murray Speirs Ecological Preserve was established in the southern part of Altona Forest.¹⁰⁷



TRCA property acquisitions for Altona Forest.

Other parts of Altona Forest which continued to be owned by Bramalea were prepared for development. Many other landowners sold their property to Bramalea to enlarge the development

¹⁰⁷ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

area.¹⁰⁸

1997 – With approximately half of Altona Forest protected, the developers turned their attention to the part of the forest approved for development. The Friends of Altona Forest coordinated plant and tree rescues which were ongoing until 1998 when all but the south portion was surrounded by development. The residential development of a large part of the original Altona Forest resulted in the loss of approximately 26 of the 66 vegetation communities and 13 partial communities which included an eastern white cedar forest and associated wetlands, three amphibian ponds, a large wet meadow, an old-field complex and several communities of lowland, upland and succession forest.

Aug. 20, 1997 – Barbara Rivett sold Part 1 on plan 40r-9866, the triangle in the extreme north, to The Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority to expand Altona Forest. The selling price was \$213,000.¹⁰⁹

While all this was going on, the inhabitants of Altona Forest continued their natural development. There were a few foxes in the forest but the coyotes drove many of them out. A small herd of white-tailed deer roamed freely but were being crowded into the forest by continued surrounding development. The deer were so hungry they have nearly destroyed the forest floor flowers, which they have grazed repeatedly. By 2008, much of the spring flowers like trillium, have been destroyed by the deer. This is less the deer's fault and more the result of lessened area to feed. Eventually the number of deer will diminish to a level more in keeping with the size of the forest.

It soon became evident that as neighbours' pets were allowed to run freely in the forest, they harmed the forest wildlife. Cats have killed many birds and residents needed to be educated. Altona Forest was saved from development but would surrounding development still destroy it?

Oct. 10, 1997 – TRCA received an application for alteration of the watercourse of Rosebank Tributary where it runs under Strouds Lane. The application also included the building of a 65 metre box culvert over the tributary on Strouds Lane. These were approved and the plans proceeded. This allowed development off Strouds Lane west of Rosebank Tributary but proved to be a barrier to medium to larger animals in the forest which now had to cross the road to get to the southern part of Altona Forest and to Petticoat Creek Conservation Area.

June 1999 – Dr. Speirs contracted Doug Lockrey, with the assistance of Heather Jessop, to walk along 10 1000 foot survey



White cedar

¹⁰⁸ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

¹⁰⁹ Land Registry book, Durham Land Registry Office, 590 Rossland Road Whitby

lines, in the J. Murray Speirs Ecological Reserve. Throughout the month of June they identified birds by their songs and inserted the specific birds on a grid, enabling Dr. Speirs to estimate the numbers of nests in the forest.

Sept. 1999 – Vol. 1 Number 1 of the Altona Forest Community Newsletter was distributed this month to libraries, community members who expressed an interest in the forest and to those residents who live on streets which border on Altona Forest. It started with “Your home is situated next to some of the most environmentally significant land in Pickering: the Altona Forest.”¹¹⁰ The newsletter went on to explain more about the 52.7 hectare forest, the Environmental Management Plan, Stewardship Guidelines for Neighbours of Altona Forest, Natural Landscaping for those close to the forest, including recommended trees, shrubs, wildflowers and ground covers, and contact information if they had questions.

Dec. 1 1999 – The Altona Forest Stewardship Committee was officially established with representation from the TRCA, Pickering Naturalists, Ministry of Natural Resources, Friends of Altona Forest, teachers, students and concerned citizens. The first meeting took place on this date at Dunbarton High School, Pickering. The meeting discussed the role of the Stewardship Committee and a Draft Terms of Reference was drawn up. Their mandate was to help manage the forest and give recommendations to the TRCA for rehabilitation projects.

The committee continues to monitor the lands within and surrounding the protected area of the forest, to consult with the TRCA and other agencies, such as the Toronto Zoo, to make plans for the restoration and improvement of the forest environment, to write grant proposals for projects and to assist with the implementation of Altona Forest Environmental Management Plan.

The Stewardship Committee has applied for and received grants from TD Canada Trust Friends of the Environment, Ontario Power Generation, The Toronto Zoo and the Trillium Foundation to carry out rehabilitation and interpretative projects in Altona Forest.

From 1999 to 2008, the Altona Forest Stewardship Committee has engaged in these restoration or improvement projects and other on-going activities:

- holding four or more stewardship meetings each year;
- organization of an Altona Forest clean-up day once a year;
- publication of an Altona Forest Newsletter one to two times a year;
- development of a 5 km long trail system with interpretive posts and signs;
- building of boardwalks over sensitive or wet areas;



Ducks at Lacey's Pond

¹¹⁰ Altona Forest Community Newsletter Vol. 1 No. 1 Sept. 1999

- experimentation with various procedures for the removal of invasive species such as common/European buckthorn and dog-strangling vine;
- removal of invasive plant species (on-going);
- development of plans for the rehabilitation of Lacey's Pond;
- construction of a berm and other measures to effect the partial restoration of Lacey's Pond which has attracted wood frogs and mallard ducks back to the forest;
- construction of an observation deck at Lacey's Pond;
- development of educational programs and interpretive hikes attended by local students, scout and girl guide groups, and members of the public (on-going);
- addition of parking facilities off Altona Road on old farm drive way;
- placement of trail rest benches at various locations;
- development of interpretative and educational guides for Altona Forest;
- organizing additional tree rescues from the south when developed was started on the extension of Stroud's Lane;
- addition of picnic tables near the parking lot;
- trail safety monitoring (on-going);
- institution of an Adopt-A-Trail program whereby residents adopt a portion of the trail to monitor and to do basic maintenance (on-going);
- development of fire fighting strategies in conjunction with the Pickering Fire Department (on-going);
- cooperation and communication with the local police, which has almost eliminated vandalism and other illegal uses of the forest because of police visits and aerial surveillance (on-going);
- archaeological surveys and studies of significant areas;
- continued development and up-keep of a web site, altonaforest.org . This site has photos and paintings of Altona Forest contributed by local residents, downloadable trail guides and much more (on-going);
- monitoring of amphibian species in the forest (on-going); and
- monitoring surface and ground water as part of the ongoing study of the impact of urban encroachment on plants and animal species, the interaction of animals within the forest, the stability of animal populations and the effects of changed drainage upon trees (on-going).

Future plans include:

- the construction of a pond in the north part of the forest specifically designed to attract other species of amphibians back to the forest (2008);
- updating of the trail and interpretive booklets to incorporate the new pond (2009);
- placement of additional interpretive signs (2008 -?); and
- restoration of water retention areas (2008-?) .
- adding a link from the parking lot to the south of Lacey's Pond;
- mapping existing trails in the section south of Strouds Lane (the pan handle);
- creating an interpretive trail in the south section of the forest (the pan handle).

Part III – 2000 to 2009

Jan. 25, 2000 – The second Altona Forest Stewardship Committee meeting took place in the library of St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic School in Pickering. At this meeting Katherine Murray was selected as the first chair of the AFSC.

Spring 2000 – Using international standards and guidelines, a standard territory mapping protocol was devised and an accurate 30 m posted grid was placed in the 9.9 ha forest plot of the Speirs Reserve by a professional surveyor. A standard protocol was applied to the interpretation of the detailed mapping data of breeding birds in this area from April to the end of June. The study was conducted by Brian Henshaw of Brooklin, Ontario and a senior ecologist with Gartner Lee Ltd. The report was completed in the fall. The study found 36 territories and 16 species of breeding bird species in the Reserve with additional ones in adjacent sections of Altona Forest. This thorough report lists the birds and even gives the locations where they were seen or heard.¹

April 17, 2000 – The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority started an archeological study in Altona Forest on this day. The excavation lasted from April 17 to 26. It was under the direction of Robert W. C. Burgar and field supervision of Catherine M. Crinnion. All field work was conducted under the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation Licence to Conduct Archaeological Exploration Survey or Fieldwork (2000-038) issued to the Toronto and Region conservation Authority. All the artifacts, field notes and plans were sent to the ROM for storage and study.



June 23, 2000 – Altona Forest Stewardship Committee Terms of Reference were finalized. The role of the Stewardship Committee, as outlined in the terms of reference, is to communicate with the public, foster a land stewardship ethic, and to work in partnership to accomplish watershed management objectives, establish guidelines and implement activities that are consistent with the

¹ Breeding Birds in an Urban Forest: Altona Forest, Pickering, prepared for Dr. J. Murray Speirs by Brian Henshaw, Nov. 2000

One wonders if the Dixons knew about the stories and may have used the plates like books for their children or were the plates, probably a set of them, among their more beautiful belongings?

The dates of manufacture of these items indicate that the Dixons likely brought these housewares with them, probably from England.



Only one artifact was found that could be from pre-contact and that was a spokeshave fragment of Onondaga cert which was formed in the shape of an arrow head.

summer 2000 – Doug Lockrey and Heather Jessop walked 5 of the 10 survey lines in the J. Murray Speirs Ecological Reserve, identifying all trees, measuring their diameters at breast height, and indicating the ground flora.

For Star Mon Oct 2, 2000

Durham Region

VANDALS AXE TREES

Residents adjacent to Pickering's Altona Forest are on the watch for vandals who have been cutting down trees and leaving them to rot. Larry Noonan of the Altona Forest Community Stewardship Committee said that over the past two weeks about 30 trees have been felled, including 16 sugar maples and three elms. An area of about 40 square metres in the forest near Woodsmere Cres. has been affected.

Oct. 1, 2000 – During the summer of 2000, vandalism in Altona Forest raised its ugly head as trees were cut down and left to rot. More than 30 trees were cut down over a two week period. The vandals were not caught. (See news articles "Vandals strike Altona Forest in Pickering"- Pickering News Advertiser, Sun. Oct. 1, 2000 and "Vandals Axe Trees," Toronto Star, Mon. Oct. 2, 2000)

A/P PAGE 8 NEWS ADVERTISER, SUNDAY EDITION, October 1, 2000



RON PIETRONIRO/ News Advertiser photo

Larry Noonan surveys the damage to trees in the Altona Forest near St. Elizabeth Seion Catholic School. He estimates that at least 30 trees have been cut down. Toronto Region Conservation Authority officials are probing the case.

goal and objectives of the approved Altona Forest Environmental Management Plan.²

July 27, 2000 – The Report of the Archaeological Excavations on TRCA Property in the Town of Pickering, Stage 4 Excavation of the Altona Forest Site (AIGs-24) was completed. The site yielded 2,932 artifacts of historical significance which dated to the 19th century and may have belonged to the Dixon family. A pile of stones were discovered which roughly corresponded to the Lot survey line. These were probably piled there as the land was cleared for agriculture. The artifacts were typical of a mid 19th century domestic farmstead and included parts of glass bottles, bowls, pipes, bone buttons, plates, square headed nails and animal remains. The mix of these items in the same spot indicated a single family domestic garbage dump. The lack of fine porcelain such as "bone china" indicated that the household was a low to middle socioeconomic status. However, some fine examples of Blue Willow Plates have design on them which dates from the 1820s to the 1860s while maker's marks on the kaolin pipe fragments come from the 1830s to the late 1870s.



Piece of bone
button.

The example of Blue Willow Plate found at this site is of particular interest as these plates usually told a story. The beautiful blue designed pattern on the Blue Willow plates looks Chinese, but were first made in England. Many English designers copied Chinese plate designs. The Blue Willow plate design is one of the best known designs in the world. (See photo of Blue Willow Plate) The story on this plate is about a rich man named Tso Ling. He lived in the house depicted on the plate. His beautiful daughter, Kwang-se, was promised to an old wealthy man. However, she fell in love with Chang, her father's clerk. Chang and Kwang-se eloped and Kwang-se's father was so angry that he was going to have them put to death. The gods intervened and turned them into turtle doves before the execution and they escaped. The two turtle doves are on the top of the plate.³



Blue Willow Plate.

² Altona Forest Community Newsletter, Nov. 2000, Vol. 2 Number 1

³ See this Internet site for an example of the story or search the net for Blue Willow Plates
www.thepotteries.org/patterns/willow.html

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A/P PAGE 8 NEWS ADVERTISER, SUNDAY EDITION, October 1, 2000



RON PIETRONIRO/ News Advertiser photo

Larry Noonan surveys the damage to trees in the Altona Forest near St. Elizabeth Seion Catholic School. He estimates that at least 30 trees have been cut down. Toronto Region Conservation Authority officials are probing the case.

Vandals strike Altona Forest in Pickering

Up to 30 trees cut down over last two weeks

The vandalism continued until there were more than 125 trees in the same area which were cut down and left to rot. The above photo and caption was an attempt to draw attention to these cowardly acts and possibly develop some leads to capture the vandals.

PICKERING — The chairman of the Altona Forest Stewardship Committee is asking residents to be on the lookout for vandals in the forest after approximately 30 trees were cut down during the past two weeks.

"I would like the neighbours to be aware of this. There is vandalism going on," said Larry Noonan, co-chairman of the committee, who first discovered 16 trees had been cut down about two weeks ago when he was out for a walk.

Now he said up to 30 have been cut, including an assortment of elm, maple, white ash, white cedar, cherry, ironwood and yellow birch that have "been cut down at odd heights... with axes and saws."

He estimated the trees, which would cost about \$20,000 to replace, range in age from five to 40 years old.

"The majority of the ones they're cutting down are about 20 years old," he said, noting most are tall and skinny.

"They're cutting trees that are moveable," he said, wondering if someone plans to return for the trees and use them as firewood.

Mr. Noonan said he's reported the damage to the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA),

which is responsible for the 52.7-hectare forest that stretches from Stroud's Lane north to Finch Avenue and from Rosebank Road west to Altona Road. The forest was designated an environmentally significant area in 1982.

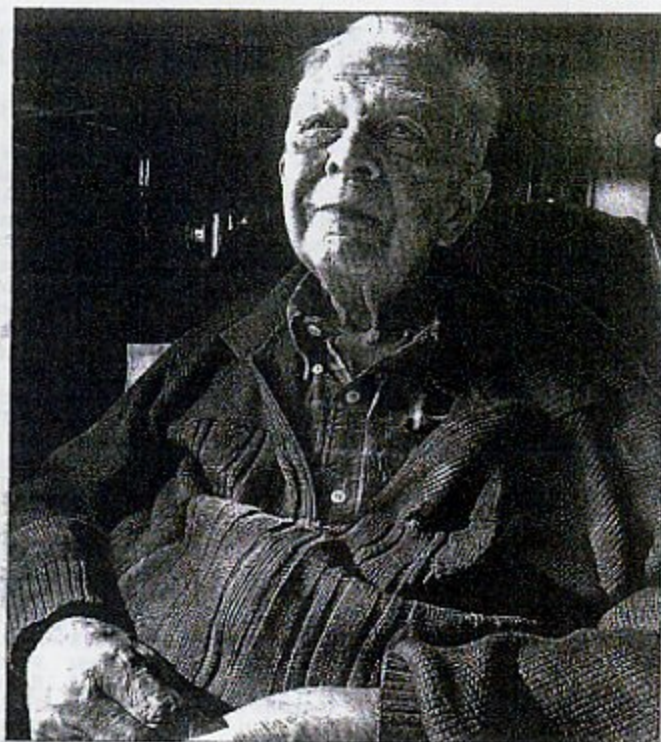
"I want these people stopped," Mr. Noonan said, noting the area is a natural forest that has all sorts of birds and wildlife as well as some rare trees. "For people to go in and chop down trees is terrible."

Mike Fitzgerald, east zone superintendent for TRCA, reported the authority repaired a hole in the fence bordering the forest Tuesday where it's believed the vandals entered. He noted staff will be increasing their visibility in the area.

"We're trying to educate the neighbourhood and the community and we will be approaching local schools to educate (students) on the sensitivity of the area," he said.

He added conservation authorities have the ability to charge individuals who damage authority property under the Conservation Authority Act, but said, "we're hoping education will be the key to our success."

Anyone with information is asked to contact the TRCA enforcement branch at (416) 984-7868.



FOR LOVE OF BIRDS: Former zoology professor Murray Speirs, recently named to the Order of Canada, was an environmentalist long before it was fashionable.

Early environmentalist to receive top honours

Ornithologist named to Order of Canada

By PAUL IRISH
DURHAM REGION BUREAU

Naturalist Murray Speirs, 91, says being appointed to the Order of Canada for his life's work is a huge honour, but he insists watching the birds flutter and feed around his Pickering cobblestone cottage is still one of his biggest thrills.

"I try to get out at least once a day," says Speirs, who will be invested as a member today in a private ceremony at his home by Governor General Adrienne Clarkson.

"There are lots of wonderful birds, but the robin is probably one of the most interesting... and it's everywhere to be seen."

Speirs' passion for the environment and all things living blossomed at the age of 6, after he borrowed a bird field guide from his older brother.

It was the first step in a dis-

tinguished career that culminated in publishing two major ornithology texts and donating his own land for ecological research.

Described as soft-spoken, witty and brilliant, Speirs studied at the University of Toronto before earning his Ph.D. at the University of Illinois in 1946.

During the war, he taught physics at a U.S. military school, did research at the Hopkins Marine Biological Station in Pacific Grove, Calif., and was a meteorologist for the transport department and Royal Air Force.

He did some of the early research into the effects of DDT and worked on ruffed grouse reintroduction programs for the Ontario government in the mid-'40s.

Eventually, he put down roots at the U of T in 1947, where he taught zoology until his mid-1970s retirement.

But his true love remained the simple beauty of the outdoors and all the wonderful living creatures — especially birds — that filled it.

"He was a protector of the

environment long before it became an issue," says niece and retired Toronto Star reporter Rosemary Speirs.

"When I was young, I remember him explaining the concept of ecology. He'd tell me: 'Ekos means house in Greek, and one should never spoil one's own home.'"

Murray and his late wife, noted artist Doris Huestis Speirs, moved to their distinctive home on a rise overlooking Altona Rd. about 50 years ago. Doris picked it out without stepping into the house, basing her choice on the wonderful woods.

In 1995, the Toronto-born Speirs donated a large parcel as an ecological reserve.

Now under the jurisdiction of the Toronto Regional Conservation Authority and part of the Altona Forest, the reserve is a site for year-round research on the environment.

"He's had a very fulfilling and interesting life," said granddaughter Margaret Wilson, who drives him to various locales to bird-watch. "He's an inspiration to everyone he meets."

A very special delivery for Pickering man

Governor-General pays visit, bestows Order of Canada



A.J. GROEN/News Advertiser photo

Pickering resident Dr. J. Murray Speirs was named to the Order of Canada by Governor-General Adrienne Clarkson Monday. She visited Dr. Speirs at his north Pickering home.

BY MIKE RUTA
Staff Writer

Pickering resident Dr. J. Murray Speirs, 91, one of the Province's most distinguished ornithologists, found himself in some heady company Monday.

In July, he was named one of the 103 Canadians appointed to or promoted within the Order of Canada, the highest honour that can be bestowed on a Canadian. But unlike most recipients, who received the decoration in a mass ceremony in Ottawa, Dr. Speirs and the Queen Mother were two of three members honoured with a personal visit by Governor General Adrienne Clarkson.

The Queen's representative in Canada visited Dr. Speirs's Altona Road home to deliver the decoration, as proud family members and friends looked on.

"You have shared your expertise and passion for ornithology in countless ways, with amateurs and professionals alike," said Gov. Gen. Clarkson. "Your books on

birds in Ontario are considered classics. A committed conservationist, you have been a mentor for many, generous with your time and, in some cases, your personal resources. A founding member of many naturalist organizations in Ontario, you also gave away a significant portion of your own land to protect a larger forest, which now bears your name.

"I'm delighted to invest you as a member of the Order of Canada."

"Thank you. You've always been a special person to me," replied Dr. Speirs.

The Governor General then sat on Dr. Speirs's living room couch and chatted easily with family and friends about birds, local wildlife and Dr. Speirs's work, among other subjects. She asked Dr. Speirs about his 1946 thesis on American robin movements in eastern North America, for which he earned a doctorate at the University of Illinois.

"How did you track that?"

See HONOUR page A2

A/P PAGE A2 NEWS ADVERTISER, WEDNESDAY EDITION, November 8, 2000

Honour bestowed on Pickering ornithologist

HONOUR from page A1

she asked.

"I sent out a lot of questionnaires," laughed Dr. Speirs.

Dr. Speirs's two-volume 'Birds of Ontario', published in 1985, is considered his life's work.

He has also been a teacher and a researcher noted for his keen observation and listening skills.

In 1995, Dr. Speirs donated a 12-hectare piece of his Pickering proper-

ty to the Toronto Regional Conservation Authority. The Dr. J. Murray Speirs Ecological Reserve continues to be a site for scientific monitoring and study.

He co-founded the Pickering Naturalists in 1977 and taught at the University of Toronto for almost 25 years.

Dr. Speirs's fascination with winged creatures began when he was a young boy in 1915 Toronto. He has said, "There's nothing more alive

than a bird."

Asked which of all his pursuits he has most enjoyed, Dr. Speirs didn't hesitate in answering, "birdwatching."

He said he views the Order of Canada as "commemoration" of his working life.

The Governor General spent

roughly 20 minutes at the Speirs's home before a staff member indicated it was time to go.

Accepting an offer to take some of the sandwiches and other treats which had been laid out, she took two sandwiches before leaving the house and waving goodbye as a black limousine took her away.

Nov. 7, 2000 – Dr. J. Murray Speirs received the Order of Canada for his life long work with the environment and wildlife. Being too ill to travel to Ottawa, the Governor General of Canada, Adrienne Clarkson, presented this award to Dr. Speirs at his home backing onto his beloved

Altona Forest.⁴(See news articles - "Early environmentalist to receive top honours," Toronto Star Nov, 2000, and "A very special delivery for Pickering man," Pickering News Advertiser, Nov. 8, 2000)

April to June 2001 – Another detailed territory mapping of breeding birds was done during these months by Brian Henshaw from Brooklin, Ontario. It was found that the J. Murray Speirs Ecological Reserve (in the southern part of Altona Forest) supported 14 species of breeding birds and additional ones in the forest outside the study area.. This data was compared with the data collected in previous studies, ie 1949, 1950, 1994, 1997, 1999 and 2000 and changes of species and or territories were noted. The number of territories declined by approximately 50% while the number of species declined steadily with the exception of 1994. Potential agents for these impacts were suggested as follows:

- increased densities of urban-sponsored predators (blue jays, American crows, squirrels, chipmunks, raccoons and red foxes);
- urban-sponsored nest parasites (cowbirds);
- human pets (dogs and cats);
- noise, light, mountain bikes, fire pits, garbage, cutting or other physical disturbance;
- social behaviour among these birds that requires the presence of conspecific;(Conspecificity is a concept in biology where two or more individual organisms or populations or taxa belong to the same species.⁵) Some conspecific birds, even territorial ones, are attracted to the same area because the presence of conspecifics in that area and it is a reliable indicator of habitat quality. The problem arises when the territory is not large enough for multiple birds of the same species.
- historical dysfunction in the development of the breeding bird community;
- a behavioural trait of the species that requires a minimum distance from houses, or;
- increased competition from resident species that are urban-tolerant.⁶



Dr. J. Murray Speirs

Breeding birds are still one of the attributes which make Altona Forest unique, however, this factor has reduced as the urban environment closed in on the forest. The report goes on to point out that good management practices, proper signage, removal of invasive plant species and initiatives of the Altona Forest Stewardship group should help the situation,

Sept. 3, 2001 – Dr. J. Murray Speirs, one of the strongest voices for the environment and the

⁴ A very special delivery for Pickering man - Governor-General pays visit, bestows Order of Canada, News Advertiser, Nov. 8, 2000)

⁵ From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia on the Internet

⁶ Breed Birds in an Urban Forest: Altona Forest, Pickering, 2001, prepared for Dr. Speirs and Rosemary Speirs by Brian Henshaw

wildlife which lives in our great outdoors, passed away of heart failure. His many friends honoured him at a funeral service and many promised to carry on his work, especially in Altona Forest. (See news article - "Community mourns death of Dr. J. Murray Speirs, Pickering News Advertiser, Wed. Sept. 5, 2001) His name lives on in the J. Murray Speirs Ecological Reserve, part of Altona Forest and his legacy of environmental work will live in perpetuity in the J. Murray Speirs Ecological Reserve. (Photo of Murray Speirs from memorial)

NEWS ADVERTISER, WEDNESDAY EDITION, September 5, 2001 PAGE A3 AP

Community mourns death of Dr. J. Murray Speirs

Renowned local ornithologist dies at 92

PICKERING — Bird lovers everywhere are mourning the loss of their "quiet giant".

Dr. J. Murray Speirs, whose long and distinguished career was honoured last November when Governor General Adrienne Clarkson visited his Altona Road home in Pickering to invest him in the Order of Canada, died Monday of heart failure at about 4 a.m. He was 92. Dr. Speirs passed away at Central Park Lodge in Toronto, where he'd been staying since the beginning of the summer.

"I think he'd want to be remembered for

his dedication to the environment," niece Rosemary Speirs said yesterday, noting he had long supported the Rouge Valley, Oak Ridges Moraine, Altona Forest and Thickson Woods in Whitchurch, among others.

She added the visit from Ms. Clarkson was certainly a highlight.

"It was a great thrill," she said. "He may have felt it honoured his life. I think it was a wonderful high for him."

A Pickering resident for more than 50 years, Dr. Speirs wore many hats in his long career, including those of author, teacher, researcher, naturalist and bird watcher. He co-founded the Pickering Naturalists in 1977, published the two-volume work "Birds of Ontario" in 1985, and in 1995 donated a 12-hectare piece of his

property in the Altona Forest, the Dr. J. Murray Speirs Ecological Reserve, which continues to be a site for scientific monitoring and study.

Linking most of his pursuits was a love of birds. Dr. Speirs once said, "There's nothing more alive than a bird," and the creatures held his fascination since he was a six-year-old boy in Toronto, watching a raven-crowned kinglet in his parents' backyard.

In 1931, at the age of 22, he joined the Wilson Ornithological Society, the first of many such groups with which he would become involved. Dr. Speirs received his doctorate at the University of Illinois in 1946 with his thesis, "Local and migratory movements of the American robin in east-

ern Northern America". In addition, he was a University of Toronto faculty member for almost 30 years.

Dr. Speirs is survived by Ms. Speirs, his step-daughter Iris Weir, nephews Gordon and David Speirs, his great-nephew John Murray Desmet, and grandchildren Adèle Khoskie, Margaret Wilson, Phillip Weir and Miles Heirn.

A funeral service is being held Saturday, Sept. 8 at 9 a.m. at McEachnie Funeral Home, 28 Old Kingston Rd., in Pickering Village. Visitation is Friday from 2 to 4 p.m. and 7 to 9 p.m. Members of the public are welcome to pay their respects, and in lieu of flowers, the family asks that a donation be made to the Pickering Naturalists.



Dr. J. Murray Speirs died Monday, leaving a legacy of active environmentalism.

Spring 2002 – Jeff Bowers started to develop the Altona Forest Website.

Feb. 27, 2002 – The Altona Forest Stewardship Committee and a representative from the TRCA presented the Draft Altona Forest Trail and Management Plan at a public meeting.



The sign at the edge of the J. Murray Speirs Ecological Reserve in Altona Forest.

M



When the clean up of Altona Forest took place in 2002, there were some unique things collected like two toilets and an old CNE amusement ride. Over the years the number of items and the size of these has decreased each year. Most of the garbage now is plastic bottles, beer bottles and paper items.



arch 2002 – The Northstar Homes sign was placed to announce the extension of Strouds Lane to Altona Road and the development of “Timber Trails Pickering Site Location”. (See photo.)

March 24, 2002 – The last photos of the Dinardo farm house were taken. This fine example of stone construction was demolished to make way for the Northstar development.



Dinardo house. A classic example of a house built of stone. It was a shame that it was destroyed for the Northstar Homes development.



Mrs. Sheppard's grade 7 class who performed the tree rescue.

April 18, 2002 – The grade 7 classes from St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic School participated in a tree rescue from the Northstar Homes site to Altona Forest. Over 100 trees were transplanted to the forest by these students.

April 20, 2002 – Members of the public gave up their Saturday to join in the saving of more than 100 additional trees from the subdivision site of Northstar Homes to Altona Forest. The Altona Forest Stewardship committee arranged this tree rescue activity in conjunction with the TRCA and in cooperation with Northstar Homes.



Public tree rescue.

June 2002 – Began invasive vegetation management program by treating Buckthorn.

June 2002 – Larry Noonan leads night time police raid into Altona Forest to an active drug house. No people were found but the drug materials were removed and the following week, the house

was dismantled by TRCA staff and everything removed.



Some of the property which is now the Northstar Development.



Northstar sign for their development. The road is Strouds Lane. Just beyond this sign is the scene pictured above and the area painted on the right.



This white pine tree grew just outside the woven wire fence line which was replaced by a chain link fence when Strouds Lane was extended to Altona Road. Strouds Lane is now located in the slight depression at the right side of the painting.

Drug users found that the seclusion of Altona Forest was an excellent area to do drugs. A number of drug sites were found over the years and each one removed. It was hoped that with the opening of the hiking trails, the privacy for such illegal actions would be disturbed. When the trails were opened the incidents of vandalism and other illegal activities in the forest reduced drastically.

June 7, 2002 – The TRCA endorsed the Altona Forest Trail Development and Management Plan.

June 14, 2002 - Vandalism continued in Altona Forest in the spring and summer of 2002. The trees were cut down by four boys between the ages of 13 to 16. Unfortunately they were never caught in the act but once they were aware that we knew who they were and enforcement officers talked to their parents, the vandalism stopped.⁷

July 2002 – With the deepening of Rosebank Tributary, Lacey's Pond was greatly reduced. Over the preceding years no frog calls were heard in this pond and it was decided to see if anything could be done to rehabilitate it. During this month the AFSC examined the pond to determine the extent of damage. The pond was found to be 2 metres by 3 metres with a depth of less than 30 cm. By the end of July the pond was dry.

Disappearing trees spark outrage in Pickering

Altona committee wants to know who is cutting, vandalizing forest

BY NICOLE MILLION

Special to the News Advertiser
PICKERING — Residents surrounding the Altona Forest are getting a little nervous.

Over the last few months several hundred trees have been stolen or vandalized, resulting in thousands of dollars in replacement costs, says Larry Noonan, Pickering resident and co-chairman of the Altona Forest Stewardship Committee.

"You can really see the missing trees. You can stand in one spot without moving and count 45 trees missing," he said.

Damage is estimated at \$88,000 for the vandalized trees, and about \$10,000 for the missing trees.

According to Mr. Noonan, the vandalism began about

two years ago, and had stopped until recently.

"There hadn't been anything (recently) until now. Ten to 12 more trees have been cut down in other areas; 127 have been cut and just left there," he said in listing one area of concern.

Mr. Noonan said he has seen several youths in the area, but was not close enough to identify them. Along with the vandalism, he claims there have been over 200 trees that have been stolen in the last two months.

Residents are also concerned about several small fires being set in the forest.

"We're getting nervous... these kids don't take any precautions."

"They set fires at the base of trees... we're worried about them starting a forest fire," he said.

Durham Regional Police, which has been contacted by residents, is working with the group to set in place new initiatives.

"We're trying to get bike patrols in there, as well as

general patrols, but manpower is a big issue," said Sergeant Mike Chesson.

Sgt. Chesson added that if caught, culprits will "absolutely face criminal charges", but admits those charges will be based on what and whom police find.

"It has to be substantiated by the evidence," he said.

Mr. Noonan warns residents not to approach any suspicious people, but to call the police immediately.

"This is not necessarily something that the public has to become personally involved in."

"We just want to urge residents and parents to be on guard and to be alert to what's happening," he said.

He noted residents and local authorities, including the police, fire department and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority are all committed to catching the thieves.

"We want to get people out enjoying the trails. The forest won't last much longer if this continues," he said.



RON PIETRONIRO/ News Advertiser photo

Pickering resident Larry Noonan says theft and vandalism in the Altona Forest are taking their toll. Area residents have contacted police, who are now monitoring the situation.

August 2002 – By the middle of this summer over 400 cedar trees, about 1 to 1.5 m in height, were stolen from the north end of Altona Forest. The old woven wire fence was cut to allow

⁷ Disappearing trees spark outrage in Pickering, News Advertiser June 14, 2002

access to a large vehicle, probably a truck. The trees were dug up and transported through the hydro property to their new home or placed where they would be sold. Attempts by the police and TRCA enforcement were unsuccessful in discovering the thieves. The TRCA took a suggestion from the AFSC to paint white dots on the remaining cedar trees in the area and this was done with the help of the Noonan family and TRCA staff. The thefts stopped after this.

Sept. 2002 – Completion of 5km of public trails along with interpretive trail guide and location posts was announced in the Altona Forest Community Newsletter. Primary entrances were from Stroud's Lane, Summerpark Cres., Chickadee Ct. and from Altona Road.⁸ With increased public use, vandalism and tree thefts decrease drastically.

Oct. 27, 2002 – The Annual Altona Forest Clean up took place. In attendance were Beavers, Cubs and Adventurers from Scouts as well as three high school students from Dunbarton H.S. along with a number of parents and children from the neighbourhood and four students from the Tree Bee club at St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic School. There was much less garbage than in previous years.

April 2003 – A grant proposal to the TD Canada Trust Friends of the Environment was submitted for the Altona Forest Interpretive Hiking Trail Project. The amount requested was \$6696.00 and was to be used for two boardwalks, three interpretive signs and trail markers.

May 12, 2003 – Altona Forest web site was launched on this date. The web master is Jeff Bowers.

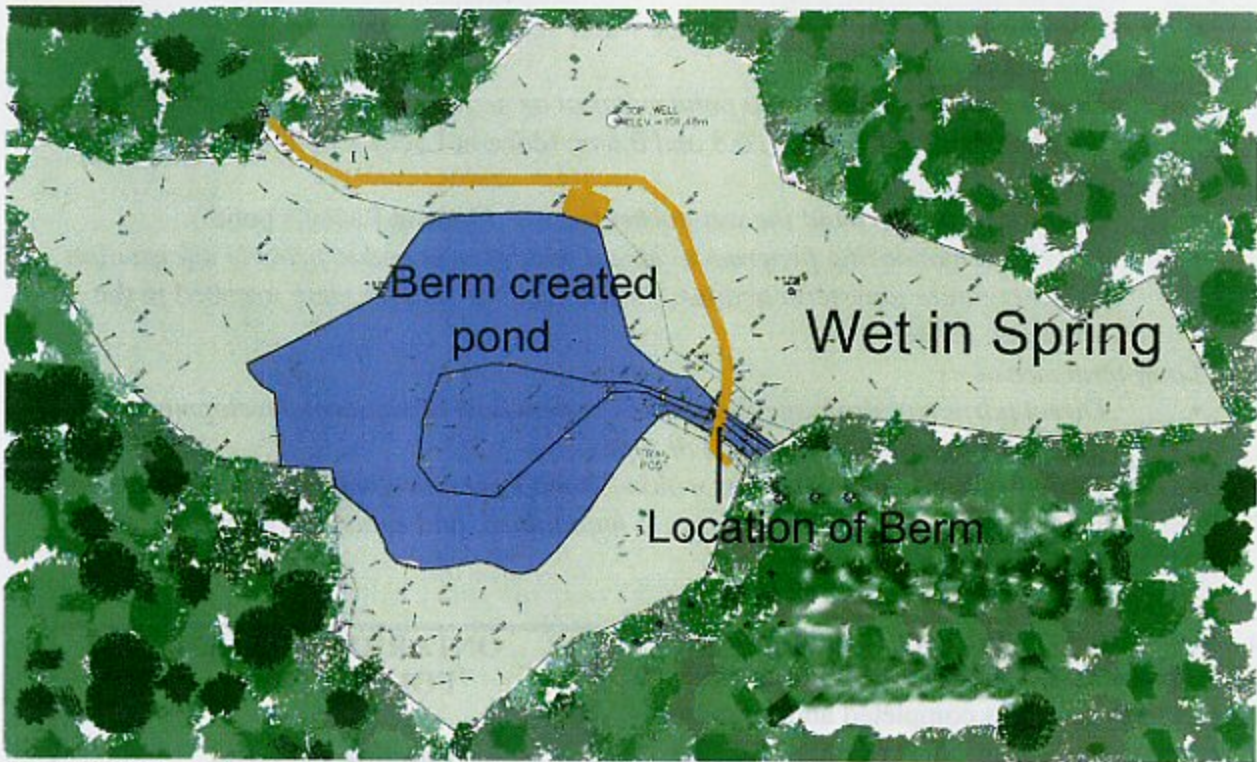
www.altonaforest.org

June 18, 2003 – Larry Noonan, (centre of photo) representing the Altona Forest Stewardship Committee, accepts the first J. Murray Speirs Rehabilitation Award at the Durham Regional Office.



June 25, 2003 – The map of the planned rehabilitation of Lacey's Pond was completed.

⁸ Altona Forest Community Newsletter, Fall 2002, Vol. 3, No. 1



Map of Lacey's pond with site of berm and projected size. The trail is marked as well.

Jan. 2004 – For a few years the members of the Altona Forest Stewardship Committee had made a number of observations about water levels, trees dying and falling over for no apparent reasons and others indicators which may have pointed to a change in the water balance in Altona Forest. A study was initiated by the TRCA and completed this month. The data interpretation suggested that developments around Altona Forest have impacted the amount of water reaching the forest vegetation. The groundwater flow and interflow within the forest and adjacent land had been disturbed and reduced because of the developments to the east and west of the forest.(this was before the additional developments to the north and south of the forest.) A comparison of pre-development, existing (2004) and probably future conditions surface runoff volume contributing to wet pocket area located within the central portion of Altona Forest indicated a reduction of up to 19% between existing and pre-development and up to a maximum of 66% under future development conditions (in 2005 to 2009). This estimation was conservative given the hydro-corridor will continue to contribute runoff under future conditions. The comparison also did not assume mitigation measures for the future development.⁹ The recommendation was:

The Altona Forest hydrologic analysis, water balance analysis and field visit by TRCA staff suggests that drainage area to the forest and runoff volumes have been altered due to developments adjacent to the forest. Following short-term and long-term measures are recommended to mitigate impacts to the forest and wet pocket areas and to ensure that

⁹ Altona Forest Hydrologic and Water Balance Analysis, Report to TRCA, Clarifica, Jan. 2004

future development does not further reduce water supply to these features.

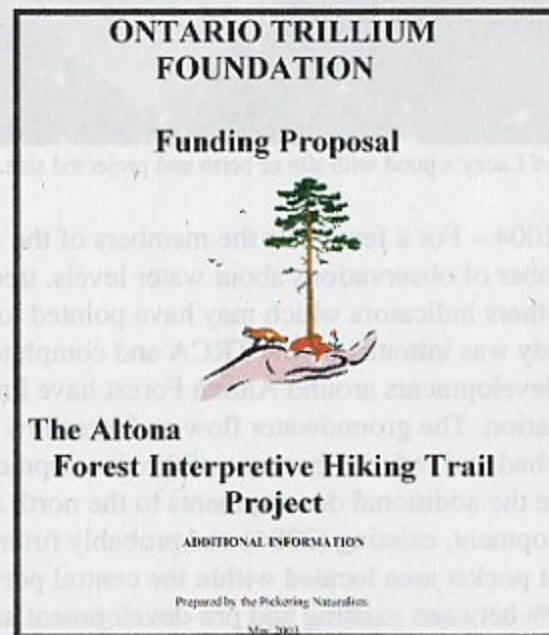
Short-term measures

- Create a check dam/berm to pond water at or near to wet pockets. The height of the dam should be between 0.3 and 0.6 m. (done at Lacey's pond but not at other sites)
- Integrate a trail around the wet pocket feature. (done at Lacey's pond.)
- Develop a monitoring program to assess water levels and to provide information to direct future long-term actions. (Water monitor stations were installed in the winter of 2008)

Long-term measures

- Direct portion of drainage from minor system flow of adjacent developments to forest through an open channel or pipe;
- Review of future developments within Altona Forest drainage areas to ensure both surface and ground water balance is maintained, and enhanced wherever possible¹⁰

Feb. 2004 – The 117 page long Trillium Foundation Fund Proposal for the Altona Forest Interpretive Hiking Trail Project was completed and submitted. This proposal was a joint effort of the AFSC, the Pickering Naturalists and the TRCA. The funds requested were in the amount of \$58,605.58 which was for the new parking lot, board walks and trail enhancements.



¹⁰ Altona Forest Hydrologic and Water Balance Analysis, Report to TRCA, Clarifica, Jan. 2004

April, 2004 – The TRCA began efforts to restore hydrology of Altona forest – improvements undertaken at Lacey's Pond to extend water retention and restore wetland habitat. A berm was constructed where Lacey's Pond starts Rosebank Tributary. This revitalized Lacey's Pond back to about 50% of its original size with the rains of spring. A pair of mallard ducks moved into the new Lacey's Pond and some hikers reported the call of a single woodfrog. This was unconfirmed as the AFSC thought the next spring would be the better time to see if the berm was successful.

Spring 2004 - Tree salvaging completed prior to installation of Stroud's Lane extension.

April 2004 – An Adopt-A-Trail program was started in Altona Forest. This program has volunteer families looking after sections of the almost 5 km of trails. Their responsibilities

Seton 504

by

Mr. Noonan's Grade 5 Students, St. Elizabeth Seton School

Bang, bang, slap!

On Wednesday, June 9th, 2004, our teacher, Mr. Noonan, brought our grade 5 class into the forest of mosquitoes to build two board walks in Altona Forest. While it was 32°C in the shade, we hammered away installing more than 200 boards. Hammering nails, slapping mosquitoes, singing, carrying wood, writing names on the boards, getting our picture taken by the News Advertiser newspaper, running out of nails once and studying the forest life resulted in aching arms and rivers of sweat and most importantly the achievement our goal of building the board walks before the end of the school day.

After the day's work, we went inside the school and had popsicles, scratched our mosquito bites and were very quiet. The smelly bug spray, mosquito bites, bruises and hard work was all worth it. We succeeded in building the board walks. Showers or a bath and a nap were on all our minds by dismissal time.

Thanks to the Conservation Authority for providing the wood, nails and three helpers. The whole community will be allowed to help with the construction of the next board walk over the wetland sometime next year but we were the first to do it. On June 22, the Conservation Authority presented each student in our class with a certificate of appreciation and some small gifts, for all their hard work.

When you go for a walk in Altona Forest from the south entrance and walk over the muddy areas without getting dirty or wet, remember the grade 5 class of 2004 who build the board walks we call Seton 504.



Kathleen, Shauna and Laura with some other students working hard on the boardwalk.

include visiting the trail at least once a month, basic cleaning of their portion of the trail, reporting dangerous leaning trees and any vandalism that they might see.

June 9, 2004 – Larry Noonan’s class of grade 5 students from St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic School built two board walks near interpretative post #3 in Altona Forest. The project was assisted by TRCA staff and some parent volunteers. The two board walks were completed by 2 p.m. that day when the students had well deserved popsicles. (See article “Seton 504”)

June 24, 2004 – After interviews and a site visit, the Ontario Trillium Foundation approved our funding proposal in the amount of \$57,600. The AFSC soon received the Letter of Agreement and after Doug Lockrey of Pickering Naturalists and Larry Noonan of the Altona Forest Stewardship Committee signed this document, we were presented with the cheque.

July 7, 2004 – The Toronto and Region Conservation (TRC), Region of Durham, City of Pickering and the Altona Forest Stewardship Committee with support from the TD Canada Trust Friends of the Environment Foundation in the amount of \$6,695.00, held the official opening of the Altona Forest Hiking Trail. (See news article “Get in touch with nature”- Pickering News Advertiser, Wed. July 14, 2004)

The funding was used for the following:

- 1 trail head sign / kiosk located at the main entrance off Stroud’s Lane – to welcome visitors to the hiking trail while pointing out acceptable activities;
- 37 interpretative posts installed along the trail at sites determined by the Trail Committee (these posts correspond to the trail hiking guide which can be downloaded from the Altona Forest web site at altonaforest.org);
- 30 metres of board walks over two wet areas close to the southern entrance to protect forest floor habitat and prevent trail spread. (See article Seton 504 in this newsletter for information on these board walks)

The trail made Altona Forest more accessible to visitors who will help to protect the forest while enjoying all the natural amenities it has to offer.



The official opening of the Altona Forest Trail system at the Stroud’s Lane kiosk. From left to right are Jeff Bowers (stewardship committee), Mike Bender (TRC), Mayor Ryan (City of Pickering), Larry Noonan (stewardship committee), Andy Wachon (manager of TD Canada Trust – Amberlea Plaza) and Doug Lockrey (Pickering Naturalists)



Get in touch with nature



A.J. Groen/ News Advertiser photo
From left, Pickering Naturalist member Karen Fawthrop, along with Larry Noonan and Doug Lockrey of the Altona Forest Stewardship Committee, were on hand for the recent opening of the new designated trail system through the Altona Forest.

Pickering's Altona Forest trail system is open for business

By Deniolo Miloy
Staff Writer

PICKERING - It's now easier for Pickering residents to discover a little slice of wildlife in their own backyard.

Altona Forest's designated trail system and 37 trail markers were officially unveiled July 7. The markers correspond with information available from the forest's Web site to guide hikers along the five-kilometre trail.

"You can walk the trail and at each marker get information about the ecological

heritage (of the forest)," said Mike Bender of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA).

"People are starting to get familiar with the forest and now they can go in on a designated path without getting lost and discover their own backyard."

The unique forest, which stretches from Stroud's Lane in the south to the hydro corridor in the north, is home to a variety of vegetation and wildlife.

"We have deer in the forest, coyotes, grey horned owls. We have a great stand of cedar trees and wetland with amphibians and water fowl," Mr. Bender said.

The trail was a long time coming.

+ See All page 2

October 23, 2004 - The public was invited to participate in the construction of the wetland board walk on this day. A number of families helped in building the 80 m long structure around the pond, which was completed in one day.

The observation deck was completed the following week. This deck is used for bird watching or just relaxing and enjoying the pond, trees and flowers in the area. Many animals visit this pond as can be witnessed by the variety of foot prints visible during the winter months.



Observation deck and completed board walk.



Michael and Matthew hammering boards on the board walk.

Last year, for the first time in over 30 years, mallard ducks nested in the pond. Spring time should bring back these nesting ducks to the pond. It is hoped that amphibians will also return to the pond this spring.

All signs point to nature

+ All from page 1

Larry Noonan, chairman of the Altona Forest Stewardship committee, and committee member Doug Lockrey spent a year surveying the existing paths and mapping out the new trail.

"It's a long time to get to this point where the markers are in there and people can do it on their own," Mr. Noonan said.

He also spent a lot of time researching the different plants, trees, flowers and animals in order to create the interpretative guide (available at www.altonaforest.org).

"It's a great place to go to look at trees and wild flowers and if you're content to be quiet you might catch a glimpse of some wild animals," Mr. Noonan said.

The stewardship committee prepared a funding proposal in April 2003 to submit to TD Canada Trust Friends of the Environment Foundation to pay for the markers and the kiosk at the Stroud's Lane entrance to the trail. They received \$5,000.

A partial trail had previously been marked with ribbons that kept falling off.

Mr. Noonan said it felt really good to see the sign and markers up so more people can now enjoy the forest.

He added he hopes the increase in users has another effect.

"Now with people walking it we're hoping that will discourage vandals from coming in," he said.

The Altona Forest was acquired by the TRCA from 1993 to 1997 with funding support from the provincial government, Region of Durham and City of Pickering. It is 53 hectares and includes the J. Murray Speirs Ecological Reserve, donated by Dr. Speirs in 1996. The public is not permitted in the reserve.

Access to the observation deck is easiest from the Chickadee entrance on the west side of the forest. Hikers could travel through the wetland area keeping dry while avoiding damage to this sensitive area. Trillium Foundation was acknowledged for their funding of this project.

Construction of observation deck and elevated board walks around Lacey's Pond was completed by members of the public. A number of families helped build the 80-m long structure around the pond, which was completed in one day.

March 24, 2005 -- The Vegetative Edge Management Program from the new townhouse development on Chickadee Court was released. The developer agreed to keep a 2.0 m wide strip of natural revegetation inside their property along the existing fence on the Altona Forest property Line.¹¹

March 30, 2005 – Thanks to Bob Johnson at the Toronto Zoo, a frog monitoring station was borrowed by Larry Noonan, chair of Altona Forest Stewardship Committee and placed at Lacey's Pond. This project was to determine what frog species lived in Lacey's Pond. Frogs which have been reported in Altona Forest in the past include: chorus, wood, leopard, treefrog, green frog, Amereican toad, and perhaps bullfrog, spring peeper, pickerel and mink frogs.



Bob Johnson, curator of Amphibians and Reptiles at the Toronto Zoo, sets up the frog monitoring station.

The frog monitor recorded a short sound bite every 20 minutes as well as the exact time and the air temperature. Larry Noonan picked up the tape every three days and put the results in a log book.

April 6, 2005 -- The berm at Lacey's Pond was found destroyed. Apparently this vandalism was done on over the preceding weekend. Some residents had expressed concern that the newly created pond would increase mosquito breeding in the forest and thus increase the chances of West Nile Virus carrying mosquitoes in the area. The next newsletter explained what the news media had report numerous times, that is, that West Nile Virus carrying mosquitoes breed in small areas

¹¹ Vegetative Edge Management Program, Christopher Clayton, Landscape Architect. O.A.L.A., Toronto

of water like in a bird bath etc. and not in ponds. In fact, ponds make excellent homes for the predators of mosquitoes including those who carry West Nile. The berm was repaired and destroyed again the next weekend. It was repaired again and again destroyed. Finally it was repaired and a steel grid installed to protect it. This, and the delivery of the next news letter to near-by residents resulted in no further destruction to the berm.



April 15, 2005 -- The frog monitoring station was recording a variety of birds, train whistles, airplanes, dogs barking but no frogs. On this day it was different. The faint calls of one wood frog could be heard at 5:59 p.m. with the outdoor temperature at 0°C. At 11:58 p.m. with the temperature of 1°C, there were the calls of a number of wood frogs.

Sunday April 17, 2005 -- The Lacey's Pond frog monitoring station records multiple loud quacking of wood frogs at 11:51 a.m. with a temperature of 12°C. Later that afternoon, at 3:50 p.m., the monitoring station recorded vandals smashing the railings on the observation deck. The voices were male and they were doing their dirty work in broad daylight. Unfortunately, they never called each other by name, at least that we could discern. The TRCA repaired the railings quickly as it was dangerous without them. The repair was effected with thicker boards and heavier hardware in an attempt to prevent a repeat of this incident. Over the next few days, many examples of wood frog calls were recorded. No other frog calls were heard.

April 19, 2005 -- The annual Altona Forest Spring Clean Up started out from the parking lot at St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic School. The amount of garbage was noticeably reduced from previous years when there was no trail.

Friday April 29, 2005 -- Despite the mating season for wood frogs extending into the early part of May on average, 11:11 p.m. on this date with a temperature of 4°C, was the last recorded wood frog call for this year. The monitoring went on to see if any other frogs would show up.

June 17, 2005 -- TRCA and City of Pickering by-law enforcement officers, lead by Larry Noonan, descend on an elaborate drug house in the southern reserve. The drug house was under construction using band new lumber and boxed spiral nails from Home Depot. It had a dug out soon to be secret storage place under the subfloor which was not finished. The group had cut down 15 trees to clear a section in which to build. All the material was removed. Even though the culprits were



Drug house foundation with some of the building materials.

not caught, the amount of money spend on building materials which was siezed, must have been in the hundreds of dollars.

June 22, 2005 -- With the number of recordings totalling 2320, the last recording using the frog monitor was taken at Lacey's Pond at 8:21 a.m. on this date with a temperature of 16°C. Only the wood frog had managed to reestablish itself at Lacey's Pond. The reasons for this were found to be the length of time that water is available in the pond is only sufficient for the wood frogs. The three ponds which were destroyed by development just east of Lacey's Pond retained water longer and thus were capable of sustaining a wider variety of frog species. As one of the mandates of the Altona Forest Stewardship Committee is to study ways to rehabilitate the forest, it was decided to look into the establishment of another amphibian pond which could attract one or more of the other frog species.

June 2005 -- The play cabin built in the 1960s was set on fire. Thankfully the little arsonists didn't know how to do it and the logs were only severely singed. Close-by trees also show evidence of fires being set at their base. It was decided that the play cabin would have to be dismantled in order to discourage these people from this area. This was done and the logs used to edge the trail in this area. It is unfortunate that a cabin which had given so many children and teens fun for almost 50 years had to be taken apart because of some stupid pre teens who instead of playing in and around it, wanted to burn it down for some unknown reason.



Michael Noonan at the 1960s log cabin in Nov. of 2000.

Spring and summer 2005 - Other trail improvements include the installation of 10 rest area log benches, and the installation of trail head signage.

durhamregion.com

THE NEWS ADVERTISER, SEPTEMBER 16, 2005 PAGE 7 A/P

Altona Forest improvements a dream come true

Official says changes allow people to use trails year-round

By Daniella Milley
Staff Writer

PICKERING — Larry Noonan's dreams for the Altona Forest are finally coming to fruition.

The unique forest near Altona Road and Strouds Lane has been outfitted with boardwalks, a new trail connection, an observation deck, additional picnic tables and benches, and a parking lot thanks to a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

"It meant we could start to fulfill our dreams for the forest, which is allowing people

to have access to the trails 12 months of the year," said Mr. Noonan, chairman of the Altona Forest Stewardship Committee.

He explained that in the spring and during wet times areas of the trail would become impassable so people would divert off them. This won't be an issue anymore thanks to the boardwalks.

"They'll keep people on the trails so they're not going through the sensitive areas,"

Mr. Noonan said.

The parking lot also serves an important function.

"It allows people to travel from various places to enjoy the forest," he said. The only parking in the past had been on-street.

Although the boardwalks and parking lot are important, Mr. Noonan said the jewel of the new work is the observation deck.

The 12-foot-by-12-foot structure overlooks the for-

est's wetlands and ponds. People can sit on one of the benches and watch the ducks swim or have a rest before continuing on the trails.

"People come in and they say they love it," Mr. Noonan said. The observation deck is also going to serve as the reception area when the improvements and additions to the forest are officially unveiled Sept. 19 at 10 a.m.

The public is invited to come out and see the chang-

es as well, once the official ceremony is over around 10:50 a.m. Those interested can go on a one-hour hike to see all the additions.

Altona Forest is owned and managed by Toronto and Region Conservation; in 1998 the stewardship committee was created to help in the planning of and fundraising for the forest.

For more information or to download maps of trails, visit www.altonaforest.org.

Aug 1, 2005 -- The deadline for submitting the final report to Trillium could not be met as the construction of the parking lot was not complete. We asked for and got an extension to Dec. 1.

Aug. 15, 2005 -- A clearing located about 100 m from the drug house which was removed in June, was discovered. Sixteen trees were cut down and a small farming operation was started. Fertilizer and tools were abandoned as whatever the crop was, it was harvest. The police were notified and the GPS location added to their helicopter surveillance. No additional activity was seen in this area.

May 7, 2005 -- Many parties are held in Altona Forest. Some are at the observation deck and sometimes these result in vandalism and / or beer bottles being thrown into Lacey's Pond. The more hikers on the trail, the fewer incidents of this type have been recorded in Altona Forest.



Summer 2005 -- Installation of first public parking area, allowing for the safe access to the trails of Altona forest was completed. The parking lot was built on the old drive way to one of the original farm houses.

Sept. 18, 2005 -- The Altona Forest Stewardship Committee, the Pickering Naturalists, the Toronto and Region Conservation and the City of Pickering hosted a trail opening event at Altona Forest. The final preparation of the trails, which took place between August 2004 and August 2005, was made possible by a grant to the Pickering Naturalists from The Ontario Trillium Foundation. The final work included earth work (clearing, excavating and grading), access area (parking lot materials, topsoil, stiles and stones), restoration (native trees and shrubs), wetland boardwalks (at-grade boardwalks, a raised boardwalk and the observation deck at Lacey's Pond), rest areas (forest benches and wheelchair- accessible picnic tables) and signage (trail head signs and trail marker posts).

Dec. 1, 2005 -- The Reporting Forms for One-Year Grants, with receipts and all documentation, was prepared and submitted to the Ontario Trillium Foundation completing our obligations.

April 10, 2006 -- Paintball games are evident around the Chickadee entrance as the signs and many trees there are covered with the exploded paint balls. Larry Noonan reported this to the police. Constable J. Mitschang assured the AFSC that these individuals could be charged. The local residents were asked to phone the police if they saw anyone enter the forest with paintball guns.



Sign was hit many times by paint balls.

Summer 2006 -- Trails were marked with directional blazing and explanatory signage was

installed.

Sept 18, 2006 -- A meeting was held in north Altona Forest to discuss the needs and location of a new amphibian pond. Holes were dug to check the ground water and a plan of action was devised. In attendance were Larry Noonan AFSC, Dave Ireland, Toronto Zoo's Adopt-A-Pond Program, and three contractors who advised the group.

Fall 2006 -- A grant proposal was prepared by Larry Noonan and sent to the Ontario Power Generation in the amount of \$5000. The money was to go totally toward the construction of a new amphibian pond in the northern part of Altona Forest. This proposal was lost when the administration at OPG responsible for the applications was transferred to another job and her replacement could not find it. A new application was submitted in the spring of 2007 and approved.

Dec. 14, 2006 -- On this day Doug Lockrey received an Environmental Award from the Pickering Naturalists for his efforts to improve many environmentally sensitive areas but especially for all his work and contributions to the development of Altona Forest.

Spring 2007 -- Continued invasive exotic vegetation treatments, focussing on Dog-strangling Vine and Buckthorn.

Summer 2007 -- Secured funding in the amount of \$17,600 from Toronto Zoo, Ontario Power Generation, and TD Friends of the Environment to construct amphibian pond in the north portion of the Forest.

July 2007 -- Altona Forest was part of the presentation in the Provincial Communities in Bloom competition which Pickering entered for the first time. In awarding top marks to Altona Forest, the judges made a number of comments on the official 2007 Provincial Evaluation Form, which included: "Pickering enjoys the special privilege of having within its borders many naturally landscaped areas, some in conjunction with the Toronto Conservation Authority and others with joint partners. Within this smorgasbord of beauty, Altona Forest stands out as a unique gem. Congratulations on successfully saving this natural landscaped area from encroachment



Doug Lockrey with the Environmental award receiving congratulations.



Lacey's Pond sign with observation deck in background.

by development.” and “It is hard to add suggestions here as they seem to have plans well underway.”

The very high marks received by Altona Forest helped Pickering achieve the 5 Bloom status in Communities in Bloom, the highest award a City can achieve.

Aug. 2007 – Installation of ground water monitoring devices to better understand impacts and changes taking place in the forest (on-going).

Fall 2007 - Secured funding for the Healthy Headwaters Initiatives from EcoAction.

Dec. 10, 2007 – After much study of surface and ground water and other factors, a number of sites were identified as possible locations with acceptable hydrolics for catching and retaining water for an additional amphibian pond, for which funding was already in place. These were as follows:

- site #1 south of trail near post #29 which has space for an appropriate size of pond and is an open canopy with minimal removal of trees and thick forest nearby. This is the preferred choice of the Stewardship Committee as it has the necessary physical conditions of water flow, is close to the trail for interpretative purposes and it is surrounded by trees.
- site #2 north of site #1 on north side of the trail which requires additional tree removal of invasive and formerly open field tree species.
- site #3 south of post #25 on trail which has sufficient size with open canopy and only some small clumps of trees would have to be removed to create suitable slope and depth contours.
- site #4 along old creek bed east of post #19 and leading to storm catchment in a resident’s back yard. This site was determined to be too narrow and not available for interpretation. It was identified for remedial work to slow water flow to the storm catchment.



Water monitoring station installed in Altona Forest to check ground water levels.

Feb. 29, 2008 -- The chair of the Altona Forest Stewardship Committee wrote a letter to the Honourable Jim Watson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, asking for the Altona Forest to be added to Ontario's Greenbelt which is just north of the forest. A reply later stated that the suggestion would be taken under consideration.

April, 2008 -- Rosemary Speirs, as the President of Ontario Nature, wrote a letter to the Honourable Jim Watson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, to use the new Greenbelt expansion criteria to accept the Altona Forest into the Greenbelt. This would give Altona Forest

and additional level of protection. She ended her letter with a plea for allowing more input into the process for expansion by saying:

I would urge you to rethink Criteria One to allow Greenbelt expansion proposals to come from a wider variety of organizations than just municipal councils. I'd like to see Conservation Authorities proposing expansions that will better protect watersheds. It would be wonderful to see Hydro One proposing to maintain its hydro corridors as vital Greenbelt linkages. Land Stewardship Councils, environmental organizations, naturalist clubs, farmers' organizations, and concerned citizen groups could all contribute to the discussion of where the Greenbelt should be expanded.

Opening the doors to allow more organizations—and members of the public-- to suggest Greenbelt expansions would, I believe, increase the public's sense of ownership of the Greenbelt. It will also make for a more positive process. Otherwise, the debate threatens to take place in an atmosphere of acrimony as concerned citizens find themselves facing all the difficulties of persuading municipal councilors who are besieged on the other side by developers demanding more development lands.

It was believed that there is still a strong impulse on the part of City Councillors to "pave over paradise" to raise more revenue for the city and the Greenbelt legislation was one way to curb this impulse.

July 29, 2008 – The judging for the 2008 Communities in Bloom took place on this day. The judges were very complimentary of the Altona Forest and the volunteers who look after it. The committee awaited the judges comments which usually come in during the fall.

August 27, 2008 – The final plans for the new Altona Forest amphibian pond is shared with Larry Noonan, chair of the Altona Forest Stewardship Committee. He immediately sent it out to the committee for their information and comments. (See map) This pond, in north Altona Forest, has been anticipated for many years. The wet spring and summer has been cited as the reason that construction will be delayed.

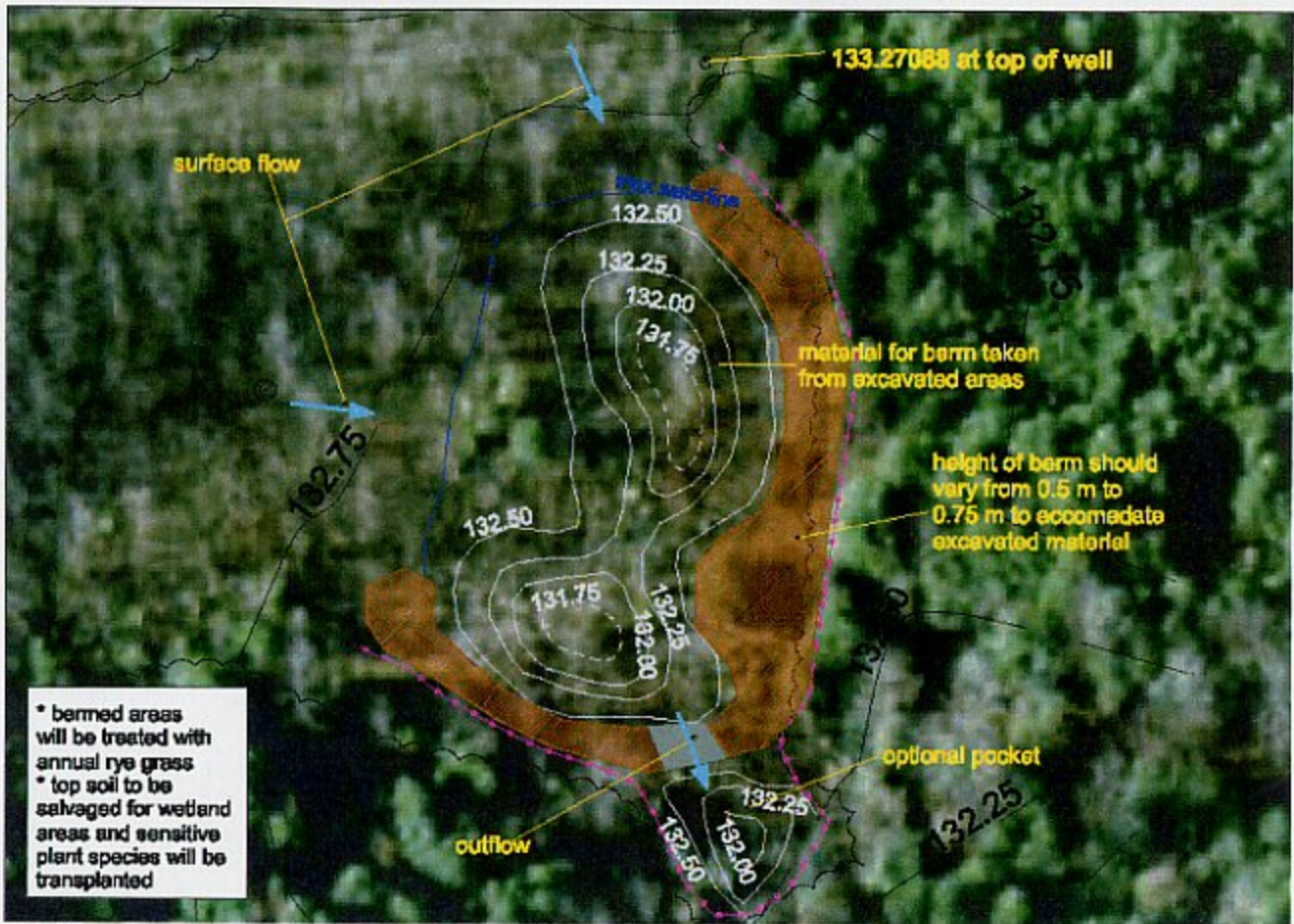
Sept. 14, 2008 -- A meeting was held in Altona Forest to see the flagging of the new amphibian. Representatives of the TRCA, Toronto Zoo and Altona Forest Stewardship Committee examined the locations of the flags before signing off on the location and size of the new pond. Sept. 16, 2008 -- The AFSC was notified that the City of Pickering has again been awarded 5 Blooms in the Communities in Bloom competition. We will await the written report.

September 22, 2008 – The construction of the new amphibian pond in north Altona Forest was initiated.

[pictures of construction]

a home for the amphibians which were eliminated by the destruction of 75% of the wet lands inside Altona Forest. This pond is the first step in the rehabilitation of the wetlands destroyed in preparation for housing developments around Altona Forest. future plans include slowing water runoff from the forest and the possible construction of wetlands inside the Hydro corridor.

All involved in the planning and construction of this pond are congratulated. Now the pond needs a name.

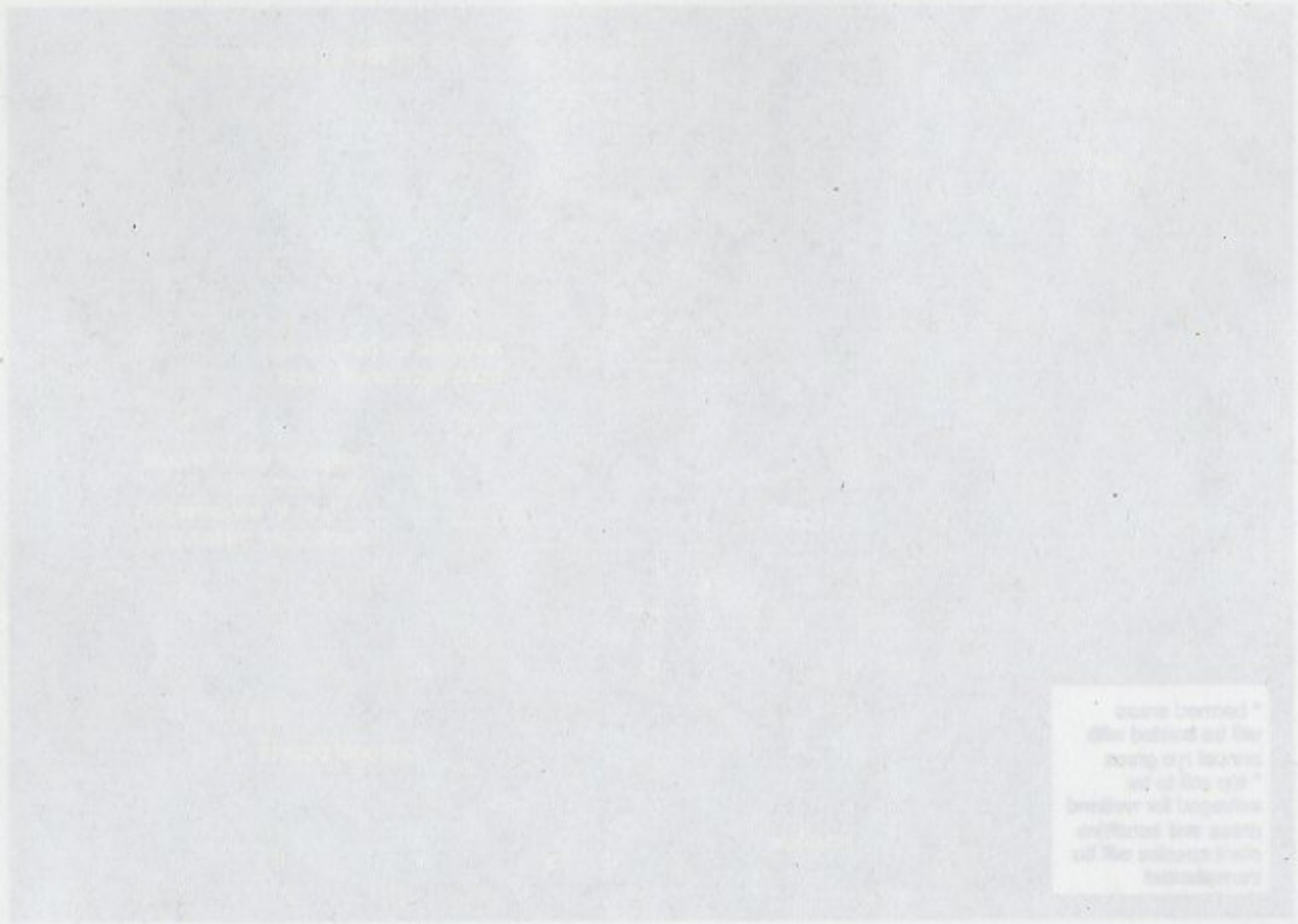


Plan of new amphibian pond. The location is near interpretive post # 29.

Nov. 4, 2008 -- The opening of the new amphibian pond occurred on this date. In attendance were representatives from the City of Pickering and the Region of Durham, the financial sponsors (TD Canada Trust Friends of the Environment, Ontario Power Generation and the Toronto Zoo), representatives of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and members of the Altona Forest Stewardship Committee. Media representatives came from SNAP and the New Advertiser.

2 hours for the amphibians which were eliminated by the destruction of 75% of the wetlands
inside the wetlands. The goal is the first step in the abandonment of the wetlands destroyed
proportion for existing developments around Alton Place. Other plans include creating water
flow from the river and the possible construction of wetlands near the Hydro corridor.

All activities in the vicinity and protection of this pond are completed. Now the pond needs
a future.



* Location of the
new pond at the
end of the wetland
corridor. The wetland
corridor is located
at the end of the
wetland corridor.

Fig. 1. Location of new amphibian pond. The location is near Highway 404 & 30.

Nov. 4, 2001 - The opening of the new amphibian pond occurred on this date. In attendance
were representatives from the City of Pickering and the Region of Durham, the financial sponsors
(The Canada Trust Friends of the Environment, Ontario Power Generation and the Toronto Zoo),
representatives of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and members of the Alton
Place Stewardship Committee. Media representatives came from ZNAF and the New Adventure

NEW ALTONA FOREST AMPHIBIAN POND



Day 1, Oct. 22, 2008

Frogs which have been reported in Altona Forest in the past include: chorus, wood, leopard, Gray treefrog, green frog, American toad, and perhaps, but not confirmed, bullfrog, spring peeper, pickerel and mink frogs.

The wood frog has successfully bred in rehabilitated Lacey's Pond located near interpretation post #12.



Day 2, Sept. 23, 2008



Day 3, Sept. 24, 2006

This pond supplies the necessary April to May sunny water environment with the near-by damp woods environment for the rest of the summer and fall.

This frog may move into the new pond as well. Since Lacey's Pond usually dries up in early June largely due to its very shallow nature, it was obvious that an additional pond(s) was needed to attract other frogs which need longer durations of standing water to live and breed.



Day 4, Sept. 25, 2008

Plans started in 2004 to find a location for an additional pond in an attempt to re-establish some of the amphibian species from the original Altona Forest. The following were identified as target species because of



Day 5, Sept. 26, 2008

previous habitation in the forest and because of the possibility of nearby populations still in existence but in imminent danger from development.

Chorus frog and Leopard frog – require a water environment during March and April but also a nearby meadow

with sufficient sun. Lacey's Pond does not have the meadow and is not suitable for these frogs, but the new pond and nearby meadows provide the necessary habitat.

Gray tree frog – requires water during May and early



Day 6, Sept. 29, 2008



Day 7, Sept. 30, 2008

surface area this lungless salamander requires to survive in the surrounding woods.

June but also needs small trees located near or in the water which are found at the new pond.

Green frog – this species requires permanent water for summer habitat and over wintering. The new pond satisfies these requirements.

American toad – needs pond water for May and June and may find the new pond suitable for habitation.

Red-backed salamander -- is found in pockets in the forest and this new wetland habitat will provide the moist



Day 10, Oct. 3, 2008



Day 15, Oct. 8, 2008

pond was completed one day before the official opening of Nov. 4, 2008.

After extensive study of ground and surface water levels, locations and movement, the present location was selected for the new pond and design work was completed in June of 2008. The construction of the pond was carried out in October of 2008 and the short access route to the



Day 24, Oct. 17, 2008
Deck constructions.



Day 31, Oct. 24, 2008

is hoped that other amphibians, including varieties of salamanders, and some reptiles will re-establish themselves in Altona Forest because of the new pond. Only time will tell but this is a giant step forward in achieving a more balanced ecology within Altona Forest.

Since deer and coyote tracks have already been spotted at the new pond, it is expected that this pond will become a centre of activity for many of the animals in Altona Forest. It



Day 42, Nov. 4, Official opening of pond.





The Rouge - Duffin Corridor Is The Altona Forest

by A. Michael Kundu

Hidden behind a labyrinth of expanding subdivisions in Pickering, a fragile corridor of greenspace runs the gauntlet from the nationally recognized Rouge Park, to Petticoat and Duffin Creek and beyond.

Any morning, in various places along this corridor, one might encounter nervous White-tail Deer or Eastern Cottontails grazing in the early warmth. Matted wildlife trails network the area: snipped buds and fresh tracks indicate that these trails are used regularly - a testimony to the value of this greenbelt as a thoroughfare for migrating flora and fauna.

This Rouge-Duffin Corridor, linked by a series of unique, interconnected biomes, features one distinctive wood, known to local residents and environmentalists as the Altona Forest.

These 134 hectares of mature-mixed forest, meadows and wetlands, framed by Altona and Rosebank Roads in Pickering, straddle the main branch and tributaries of Petticoat Creek.

The diversity of habitat

occurring in the Altona Forest is astounding: stands of Eastern Hemlock and Balsam fir blend with Eastern White Cedar and Blue Beech swamps, which in turn, transform into forests of Sugar Maple, Beech, Birch and Ash. The forest also harbours a myriad of wildlife species, from Red-shouldered Hawks to Red-backed Salamanders.

Seemingly, the Altona Forest represents a microcosm of a much larger natural region; an incredible prospect when one considers that this forest exists within the bustle of a relatively developed community.

There is a good chance that this forest will soon be toppled for the purpose of development. A large part of the Altona Forest is owned by a prolific developer, and for many years, Bramalea Limited has argued its right to build a subdivision on the Altona property.

Supported by a majority of Pickering's municipal council members, Bramalea Ltd., along with other developers, continually pressure the town to accept their applications to proceed with the clear-

ing of Altona Forest.

In recent weeks, developers have joined forces with local trade unions, labour groups and builder's associations in an effort to secure permission to proceed with planned developments.

Although council meetings are always well attended by concerned area residents opposed to development in the forest, biased political tactics are consistently evidenced among some council members, whose predisposition with the development of the Altona Forest seems to dismiss legitimate ecological values and true community opinions.

A critical principle, consistently overlooked by Bramalea and other developers, is the fundamental principle of ecological interdependence. Everything in nature is connected to everything else. One of the most important reasons that the Altona Forest requires preservation is that its location facilitates wildlife movement between the Rouge, Petticoat and Duffin systems.

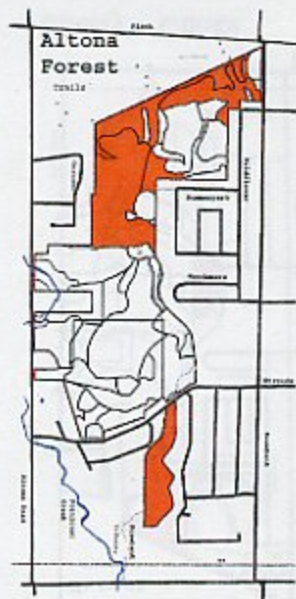
The Altona Forest also provides a suburban haven

for songbirds and other fauna; insects breeding in the Altona provide nourishment for the vocal Cardinals and Warblers that grace the surrounding neighbourhood. Fauna must be able to travel to and from one biome to another.

Currently, the case for developing the Altona Forest is in the hands of the Provincial Government and Environment Minister Ruth Grier. The developers have proceeded with costly planning proposals and blueprints, and with the recent support of Pickering Council, are still confident that they will ultimately be allowed to initiate the subdivision development of this valuable biome.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and various environmental organizations, including the Sierra Club and the Federation of Ontario Naturalists (FON), have clearly expressed that the studies and assessments of potential environmental impacts are still incomplete.

Local environmentalists are hoping that the provincial government will intervene to protect the Altona Forest - specifically now that the federal



Apple



Ash - Black



Ash - Blue



Ash - Green



Ash - White



Aspen - Largetoothed



Aspen - Trembling



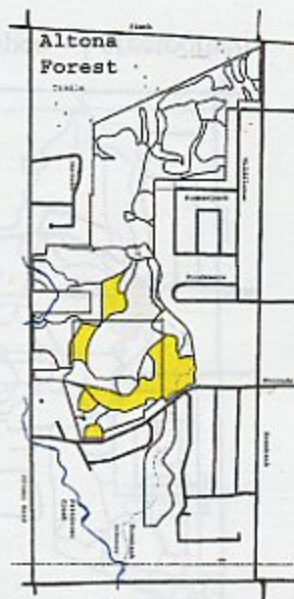
Basswood



Beech



Beech - Blue



Birch - White



Birch - Yellow



Catalpa



Cedar - White



Cherry - Black



Cherry - Choke



Dogwood - Flowering



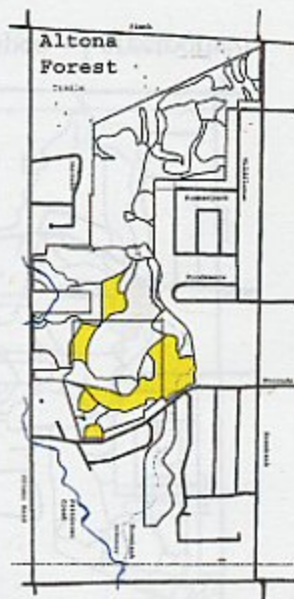
Elm - White



Fir - Balsam



Honeysuckle



Birch - White



Birch - Yellow



Catalpa



Cedar - White



Cherry - Black



Cherry - Choke



Dogwood - Flowering



Elm - White



Fir - Balsam



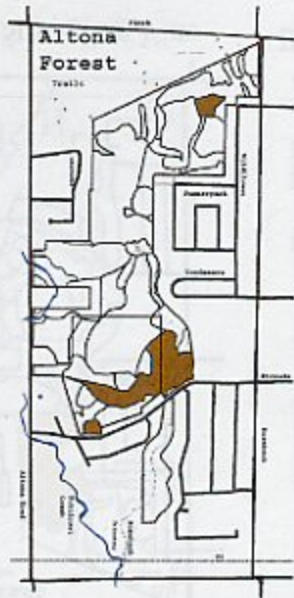
Honeysuckle



Hawthorn



Hemlock



Ironwood



Locust - Honey



Maple - Silver



Maple - Sugar



Pear



Pine - White



Poplar - Balsam



Sumac - Staghorn



Tamarack



Willow



Spruce - Norway



Horse Chestnut
/Buckeye



Poison Ivy



Wild Rose



Dog Strangling Vine



Buckthorn

Cemetery inscriptions for A J. McIntosh, who owned the west half of the property which eventually became Altona Forest.

Side 1 - In memory of Alexander Knox died Nov. 20, 1877 aged 9 mo 16 d'ys Robert John died Oct. 12, 1885 aged 1 y'r 4 mo sons of John & Isabella McIntosh Side 2 - In memory of Alexander Knox died Sep. 11, 1867 aged 58 y'rs 6 mo 11 d'ys also his wife Jane Henderson died Feb. 15, 1901 aged 93 y'rs 6 mo Natives of Berwickshire Scotland Side 3 - In memory of Thomas Knox died Dec. 21, 1842 aged 8 y'rs 9 mo James Knox died Apr. 21, 1855 aged 16 y'rs 3 mo (in McIntosh plot).

Side 1 - M In memory of Geo. McIntosh 1878 - 1959 his wife Frances Brumwell 1879 - 1959 McIntosh Side 2 - M In memory of John McIntosh died May 3, 1922 aged 81 years Native of Nairnshire, Scotland Isabella Knox beloved wife of John McIntosh died Aug. 11, 1933 aged 85 years Peace perfect peace McIntosh 4 c.m. "M".

Side 1 - John Medd died Mar. 28, 1886 aged 37 y's 1 mo 18 d's Too good from earth God called him home Medd Side 2 - Sarah Ann Palmer wife of John McIntosh died Jan. 28, 1893 aged 63 y's 16 d's Weep not for me my children dear I am not dead but sleeping here Side 3 - Elizabeth dau of John & Mar__ Medd died Jan. 29, 1882 aged 5 m's 22 d's Nip'd in the bud To blossom in heaven John S. Medd died July 24, 1899 aged 14 y's Markers: LIBBIE, FAT__ (low fence of iron rail and white posts surrounds the plot).

Obituary:

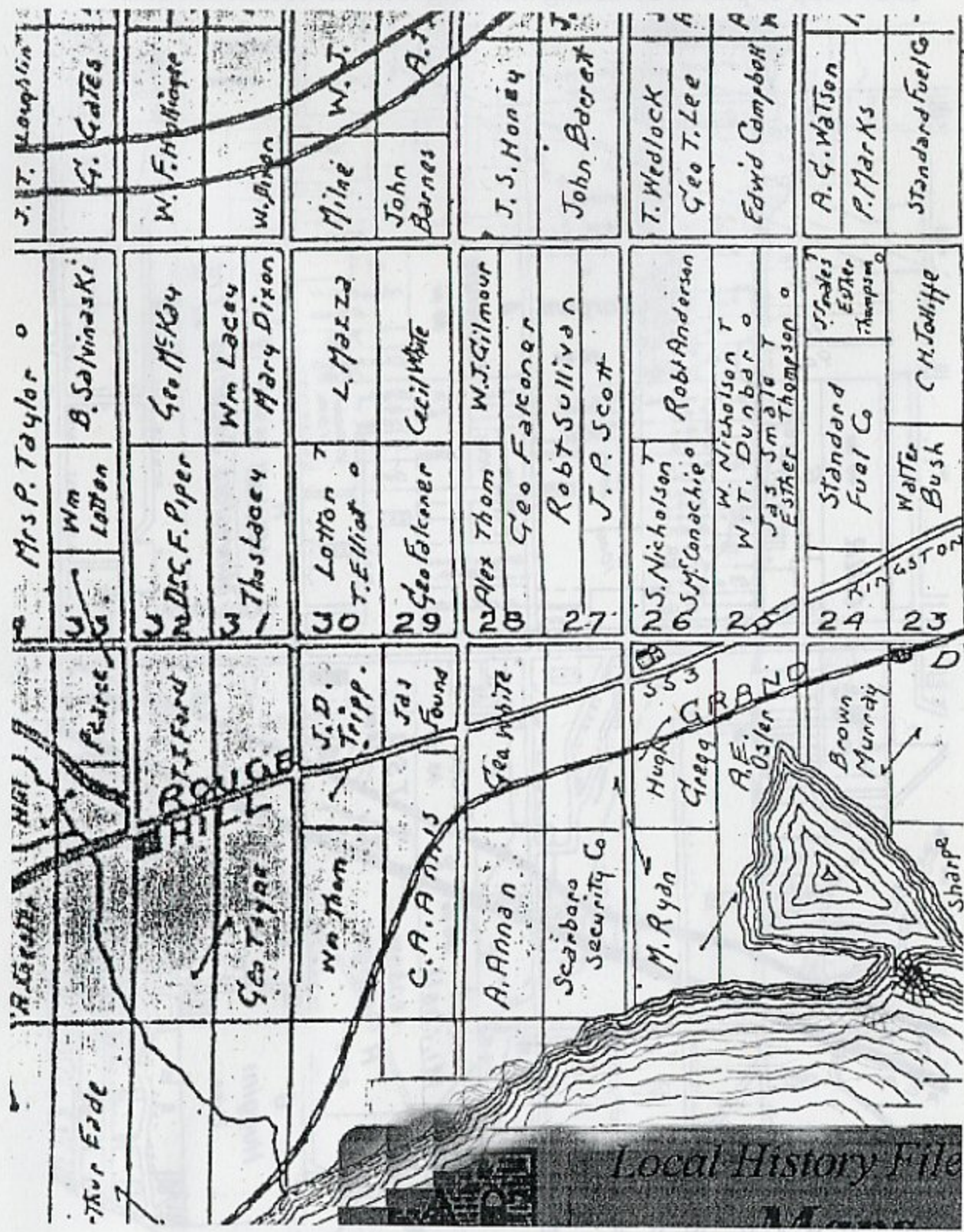
The Pickering News Friday May 5 1922
Dunbarton

After a lingering illness, John McIntosh died at his home here on Wednesday morning in his 81st year. His funeral will take place on Friday at 2:30 o'clock at Erskine Cemetery. Service will be held at the house at 2 o'clock.

1895 Map of Altona Forest showing Altona Forest land

<p>225</p>	<p>34 MR & MRS J. TAYLOR 200</p>	<p>100</p>	<p>100</p>
<p>104 D. ANNIS 52½</p>	<p>33 J. PEARCE 50 W. LOTTON 50</p>	<p>WM SINGLAIR 100</p>	<p>J. HENL 100</p>
<p>108 ALBOURN</p>	<p>32 T. HOLLIBOURNE 100</p>	<p>C. HEDGES 50 S. HOLLINGER 50</p>	<p>S. H. 25 W. HOLLIN</p>
<p>MRS H. TRIPPS 52½</p>	<p>31 R. STEVENS 100</p>	<p>T. PICKENS 50 B. DIXON 50</p>	<p>B. DIXON 62</p>
<p>C. HOLMES 64</p>	<p>30 T. PARKER 100</p>	<p>GEO. WHITE 90</p>	<p>JANET L 50</p>
<p>S S. MCDON- OGHIE 47</p>	<p>29 J. GERMON 50 J. KERR 50</p>	<p>GEO. WHITE 100</p>	<p>P. NESBITT 50</p>
<p>2 JHN ANNAN</p>	<p>MRS R. MOODY 47</p>	<p>W. GILMER 50</p>	<p>W. W. BU 50</p>

1917 Map of Pickering show land which became Altona Forest



Local History File

