

The Governor's Road



Early buildings and families
from Mississauga to London

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INTRODUCTION

'The Governor's Road' was a name coined in the 1790s for the road proposed by Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe in 1793 as a military link between Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, Lake St Clair, and Lake Huron, a spur to settlement and a deterrent to expansionist American interest in Upper Canada. In fact, the Governor's Road, although blazed and cut, was barely passable by the time Simcoe left for England in 1796. One wagon's width across at best, its path was set with boulders and stumps and it was sufficiently hazardous to both man and horse that Indian trails were frequently the better route – hence its grand name was a term of derision. Yet, the Governor's Road (officially Dundas Street) would, with its eastern and western extensions, become the spinal cord which supported the settlement of southern Ontario.

John Graves Simcoe arrived in Upper Canada in 1792, the first lieutenant-governor of the province. His prime task was to initiate and supervise settlement. In addition he needed to make plans to meet the fear of invasion from the south. Second only to the prevailing concern for survival in the wilderness, the expectation of attack from land-hungry residents of the New England states dominated the thinking of Upper Canada's pioneers. This concern affected not only settlement patterns but road development in the eighteenth and part of the nineteenth centuries. The choice of sites was frequently prompted by questions of vulnerability to attack or suitability for defence. Simcoe's astute military mind sensed immediately that American control of shipping on the lakes was quite possible and that therefore an inland military route was the only way to ensure the safe transport of troops and supplies.

Along Dundas Street through Mississauga

Twenty-two-year-old Joseph Silverthorn of Niagara brought his bride to York in April 1807. Their destination was their land grant in Toronto Township. Gale-force winds, hail, and heavy ice made the crossing of Lake Ontario hazardous. A night spent in a tavern in York, a trip to the Humber in their damaged vessel, another night spent sheltering at the mouth of the Humber, a ten-mile walk through the forest from their landing-place at the Etobicoke River, and finally 'home' – two hundred acres of dense forest, no clearing, no building on the land. The bride, Jane Silverthorn, was sixteen years old. Her fourteen children would be among the first white infants born in Toronto Township, she and Joseph among the first settlers.

Philip Cody, their only neighbour, gave them temporary shelter while they erected a shanty. Within four years the Silverthorns had constructed a sturdy stone house on their partially cleared farm (lot 11, concession 1 North of Dundas Street, Toronto Township), and by 1822 they had completed a large frame home attached to the stone building. They named their homestead Cherry Hill. Sturdily constructed, the buildings are still in use over one hundred and fifty years later, although they have been moved to the corner of Silver Creek Boulevard and Lolita Gardens, near the northwest intersection of Cawthra Road and Dundas Street. This new location is only a short distance north of the original site and still on the early Silverthorn estate. Joseph and Jane lived to celebrate their seventieth wedding anniversary in Cherry Hill.

Joseph Silverthorn had come to Upper Canada in the 1780s, carried, an infant in arms, by his parents, John and Johanna Silverthorn. Their route followed Indian trails from New Jersey to Nia-

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Cherry Hill, the Silverthorn home, lot 11, concession 1 NDS, Toronto Township



gara. Once established in Niagara, the elder Silverthorns had nine more children. When Joseph, their eldest, married and left for Toronto Township, they once again relocated and settled near his new home, thereby commencing wilderness farming for the third time. John and Johanna's daughters Rebecca Chisholm and Esther Thomas settled in Oakville and were among the founding families of that community.

Joseph and Jane's Cherry Hill homestead derived its name from the rows of cherry trees which lined the driveway from gate to barn. Known as Silverthorn cherry trees, they recalled Joseph's great-grandfather, Oliver Silverthorn, who, when he left England in 1700, brought cherry shoots to New Jersey. Descendants carried shoots from the original trees to various parts of the continent over the succeeding years.

Extensive family records provide glimpses of life at Cherry Hill. Of the fourteen children born to Joseph and Jane, twelve lived to maturity, nine daughters and three sons. They wrote affectionate letters to their parents expressing strong ties to the active home in which they grew up. Always industrious, the Silverthorns nevertheless created a warm and welcoming atmosphere, and visitors were frequent. Their nine daughters were, it seems, part of that appeal. A letter of January 1855 comments upon the family hospitality and responds to it with an unusual gift.

Dear Madam, Mr Labatt and I have met with such warm and hearty receptions on the two happy occasions when we had the good fortune of visiting you ... We have frequently thought of showing our appreciation of your kindness by presenting you with some mark of our esteem and have come to the conclusion to send you the very last thing that anyone would think of sending to a Lady and that is a half Barrel of London ale manufactured by Mr Labatt's father. Peter and Alex when up here said they never could get such Ale in Hamilton or Toronto. Mr Labatt joins me in kindest respects to Mr Silverthorn and yourself. Robert says you must kiss all the girls for him, to that I say ditto ... Thomas C. Mason

Much of the correspondence seems to centre on Janet, one of the nine daughters. This generous lady was wont to lend money to younger family members, one of whom, who signed his name as 'Boy Willie,' possibly a grandnephew, wrote of Janet: 'That dear, noble woman, I dare hardly think of. I should willingly give my blood drop by drop if I could repay and send her in high triumph the money. But

helas! It makes one weep every time I think of it and I grumble against providence for the hard lot I have to take in this world.'

Janet Silverthorn did not marry until she was sixty and then to a twenty-two-year-old artist, Leonard H. Wilder. But it was not for lack of ardent suitors that Janet waited until her sixtieth year to marry. The Silverthorn papers contain the following two letters to Janet (their authors no doubt never expected their words to become part of a collection of historic papers in the Ontario Archives). From John: 'My dearly beloved Jennet. How can I express my deep love for you, how can I tell you how I long to fold you in my embrace. It is impossible!! I shall be out on Saturday and then we shall settle about your residence, where you and I are to spend the remainder of our lives in the midst of all the little Johns and Jennets.' From Barney:...'How I long to see you and press you to my panting bosom. Why will you not name the happy day ... when it will be out of the power of mortals to put us asunder ... From your adorer and burning-hearted worshiper.'

After the death of Joseph and Jane Silverthorn Cherry Hill passed to their three unmarried daughters. Eventually it became the property of William Stanislaus Romain, their nephew and an actor. After this time it deteriorated to a state of near ruin. It has recently been purchased by a developer who, instead of razing the building, has moved it to its present location near the original site. It is now a restaurant.

Joseph, Jane, and many of their descendants are buried near the simple stone chapel across Cawthra Road from where their home originally stood. Fronting on Dundas Street, this trim building was built in 1838 by the Anglicans, Methodists, and Presbyterians jointly, as their numbers did not warrant a separate church for each denomination. The chapel is built of Credit Valley sandstone. Set in the front gable of the simple, dignified building is a metal clock face. Its hands permanently mark 11:02 o'clock, in order, it is said, to urge latecomers to hurry. Since only the Anglicans held services at eleven, this may have created confusion for members of the other denominations.

The Union Chapel replaced an earlier log structure built in 1816 by the Silverthorns and other settlers in the area. Among them was Absalom Wilcox, in whose home William Lyon Mackenzie sheltered after the *mêlée* at Montgomery's Tavern, and whose son Allan accompanied Mackenzie on his escape. While clearing the site for the

chapel, Absalom broke his leg and, according to the Perkins Bull papers, was carried to York where an army surgeon amputated it. Absalom Wilcox and his wife Barbara are buried in the cemetery which surrounds the church.

Much of the history of the settlement can be read on the tombstones in this old graveyard. A row of six small stones crumbling from age marks the graves of young children in one family, suggesting that an epidemic was ravaging the community in the early or mid-1800s. Other stones provide wry advice, such as that of Philander Horning, who died in 1837 at the age of 34:

As I am now, so you must be
Prepare to follow after me.

Much the same advice appears on the stone of Charles W. Cordingly, but it is couched in language less poetical:

Dixie Union Chapel and cemetery, Dundas Street and Cawthra Road



Children dear, assemble here
Your parents grave to see
Not long ago we lived with you
But shortly you must dwell with us.

Yet another grave is marked with words of faint praise: 'She hath done what she could.'

When the Union Chapel was built, the village it served was called Sydenham. Later it was renamed Dixie to honour a greatly loved doctor who served the district for many years. Beaumont Wilson Bowen Dixie was descended from a distinguished British family. According to family research, his ancestors included a sister of Egbert, a ninth-century Saxon king of England, Sir Walston Dixie, merchant adventurer and lord mayor of London, Elizabeth Hastings (ninth in descent from Henry III) and her husband John Beaumont, master of the rolls, these last two also descended from Louis VIII of France.

Dr Dixie, heir to these illustrious genes, was born in Wales in 1819 and arrived in Canada with his parents in 1831. His father was Captain Richard Thomas Dixie. After schooling at Upper Canada College Beaumont Dixie studied medicine and in 1843 was licensed to practise 'Physic, Surgery and Midwifery.' The licence, issued at Kingston, was signed by the Rt Honourable Sir Charles Bagot 'one of Her Majesty's Privy Council, Governor General of British North America and Captain General and Governor in Chief in and over the Province of Canada, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and the Island of Prince Edward and Vice Admiral of the same etc' - few documents could look more official. Two years before he became a doctor, Beaumont Dixie married Anna Skynner. He practised first in Oakville and then in Grahamsville, a village north of Malton. In 1846 the Dixies moved to Springfield (later the name of the village was changed to Erindale) and there they remained. Tragedy struck the young family nine years later when their four children died in the diphtheria epidemic of 1853-4. Two daughters were subsequently born to them, for the 1861 census lists Margot, aged four, and Christianna, aged one.

In 1854, possibly just after the death of their children, the Dixies purchased property at the end of Dundas Crescent North in Erindale. It is likely that they moved into a house that already stood on the property, for some of the neoclassical details of 1437 Dundas

Crescent suggest that it could have been built in the 1820s. Of particular interest are the Venetian windows that flank the door. Each window consists of a twelve-over-twelve-paned sash surrounded by plain pilasters and flanked by five-paned vertical sidelights. Although now covered with aluminum siding, the building's pleasing proportions and interest of detail are still in evidence.

In 1867 Anna Dixie died. The following year Dr Dixie married Elizabeth Blakely, thus providing a step-mother for his daughters, who were at the time about ten and seven years old. Elizabeth also bore a daughter, Sarah, who lived in the Dixie family home until her death in 1951. Beaumont Dixie provided medical care for the people of Erindale for fifty-two years. He died on his seventy-ninth birthday in 1898.

In recent years the Dixie house has acquired a degree of notoriety, for during the summer of 1973 the body of Christine Demeter was found in the garage which adjoins the house. Her husband was

Dr Dixie's Erindale house, 1437 Dundas Crescent



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charged with arranging for her murder and, after a lengthy and widely publicized trial, was found guilty.

The house on Dundas Crescent was not the Dixie's first house in Erindale. When they first moved to the community in 1846, they lived for four years in a remarkably attractive cottage situated a short distance west of Mississauga Road, at 1921 Dundas Street. It is easy to understand why the young couple found the house desirable, for it is an elegant structure, well proportioned, with fine architectural details and large windows which flood the house with light. Obviously it was a house meant for a gentleman and who better than Beaumont Dixie of distinguished lineage.

When Dr Dixie bought the cottage, two years before the family actually moved to Erindale, the building was ten or fifteen years old. The original owner was also a gentleman – Sir John Beverley Robinson, chief justice of Upper Canada. His life has been well documented, yet nowhere is there a mention of his fine cottage at

Erindale cottage of Sir John Beverley Robinson, 1921 Dundas Street



Erindale. Anthony Adamson, long-time resident of Peel County and authority on Upper Canadian architecture, suggests that Robinson may have enjoyed the idea of having a 'playful elegant small house' in the country and speculates that the designer could have been William Chewett, Deputy surveyor-general. Certainly the designer was skilled and creative. Adamson refers to the building as a 'hipped roof cottage with lots of fun on the exterior.' In 1833 Dr Coleman, one of two physicians living in the village at the time, remarked in a letter to his sisters in England that 'A Mr Robinson, who holds the official situation of Chief Justice of the Province, is about to erect a country seat immediately opposite the place fixed for my cottage on the opposite side of the road.' Robinson probably spent little time in Erindale as he was also completing his impressive home, Beverley House, in York at this time and was beset by both financial and political difficulties. As Adamson comments, Robinson was 'building two houses and suffering from very poor cash flow, as the government never seemed to get around to paying him for his services as solicitor general.' Finally he sold the cottage and fifty acres of land. It passed through the hands of several owners until it was purchased by Beaumont Dixie. During his tenure Dr Dixie built a summer kitchen and added outbuildings, but the house was cold and draughty, possibly because of its many windows. According to Anthony Adamson, the Dixies sold the Robinson house four years later and lived in Dr Coleman's home until they purchased the frame house on Dundas Crescent.

Dr Dixie sold the Robinson cottage to John Irvine, who, four years later, sold it to Charles Mitchell. Mitchell's wife was a daughter of Colonel Peter Adamson, one of the township's first settlers. Her uncle, Joseph Adamson, was the first doctor in Toronto Township, a man greatly loved by his patients, both white and Indian. The journals of the Reverend Peter Jones of the Credit Reserve mention Dr Adamson's work there: 'After meeting I called the men together to lay before them the proposition of Dr Joseph Adamson respecting his attendance on the sick of this place. His offer is to attend them one year if every man will engage to give him two days work during the year. After explaining this to them they unanimously agreed to accept the Doctor's offer.'

Dr Adamson's young partner, Dr Coleman, described him as 'an elderly man who has been in practice in this neighbourhood these ten years and is exceedingly beloved and respected.' Dr Adamson, who

was forty-seven at the time these remarks were made, might not have thought of himself as 'elderly.' Four years later, during the Rebellion of 1837, he was active enough to serve as surgeon to the First Battalion, Incorporated Militia. Before his death in 1852 he lived with his niece and her family in the Robinson cottage.

In 1867 the house was sold again to yet another distinguished gentleman, the Very Reverend Dean Henry J. Grassett, DD. He was for many years dean of St James Cathedral in Toronto and used the Erindale cottage as a summer home. Subsequently the house changed hands several times until it was purchased in 1911 by Arthur and Henry Adamson, grandsons of Dr Joseph. Because of this link the house is known as the Robinson-Adamson cottage. Today this splendid building is owned by the city of Mississauga. It has been beautifully restored and stands as a significant architectural and historical site. So designated by the Ontario Heritage Act, the house is now used as Boy Scouts' Headquarters.

In the 1820s Erindale was little more than a stopping-point on the Dundas, but there were enough British families in the area to make feasible the building of a church. With the help of the Adamson brothers and other local families the Anglican parish of St Peter's was formed and a small church was erected in 1827. Before the church building was completed, the parishioners met in a local hall. The owner, however, found it bad for business because some were reluctant to rent a hall for 'dancing and other purposes when it was devoted every Sunday to Divine Worship.'

The first rector of St Peter's, an enterprising Irishman by the name of James Magrath, was nearly sixty years of age when he arrived in Upper Canada. He was accompanied by his wife, four sons aged eleven to twenty-three, and a daughter aged eight. As well, Magrath brought seven tons of household goods, said to be the largest shipment ever landed on the wharf at York until that time. One of the Magrath sons, Thomas William, wrote letters from his new home to Dublin, and these highly imaginative accounts of life in the new world were published as *Authentic Letters From Upper Canada* in 1833. In one letter the writer described his pet bear 'of the fair sex. The name to which she answers Mocaunse. Her qualities, mildness and docility.' This docile creature was, according to Magrath, trained to sit at table and eat breakfast, always waiting to be served except upon one occasion after which the writer spanked her. The thrilling Magrath accounts of sporting life in the colonies were

eagerly received at home.

The Magraths first built a log house, but before long they started work on a substantial house that they called Erindale. In honour of the Reverend James Magrath, who became the moving force in the development of the community, the village known as Springfield later adopted Erindale as its new name.

The Magraths had left Ireland in order to provide their children with better opportunities than those available to them at home. Through family connections they had introductions to many of the influential people in York who helped them become established. Like them, and like many Anglican ministers, Magrath began to speculate in real estate in order to augment his income. This was undoubtedly a necessary measure for, although his mission stretched from Hamilton to York, his parishoners were scattered and money was scarce.

By the time of his death in 1851, twenty-four years after he came to Canada, Magrath had established a respectable estate which he divided as fairly as possible among his children: 'Whereas my son Thomas William has a house of his own and my second son James has a house rented in which he carries on his business as merchant and my third son Charles has chosen a profession which keeps him in Toronto ... I leave the 200 acres on which Erindale ... stands to my son William Melchior who has neither house nor profession.' Magrath instructed that his daughter Anna Cordelia and his niece Maria be given bed and board and the running of the house. He also instructed that any of his children who needed it should receive asylum at Erindale as long as they paid £30 in rent and were prepared to help 'cheerfully on the lands, conducting themselves peaceably and kindly.' His home was obviously of great importance to the old gentleman for he said: 'It is my earnest wish that Erindale not be sold but that it remain to the family,' adding, to emphasize the point with his children, 'As You Value Your Father's Blessing.' The strong Magrath personality continues to emerge through phrases such as 'Now James cannot complain much. He gets one lot, his own lot which produces £80 per annum ... Charles I think has the box given by Lady Mountland to his grandmother ... so I leave him nothing more.' Meticulous to the last detail, Magrath adds in conclusion 'I forgot to say' ... and then disposes of the money which might be in his pocket at the moment he dies or on his desk or around the house.

The house which Magrath loved did stay in the family for many

years until one March morning when a spark from the chimney ignited some papers and Erindale burned to the ground. A new home was immediately set under construction.

Magrath's Erindale had served as the rectory of St Peter's and after his death the church was without both minister and rectory. The two clergymen who followed Magrath probably lived in rented quarters. However, during the tenure of the Reverend Honourable Thomas P. Hodge a new rectory was built. Now called the Old Manse, it is located at 1556 Dundas Street West and is a real estate office. It is a handsome building, described when it was built in 1861 as being 'as nice a parsonage house as is in the Diocese.' Recent restoration by the present owners has given it a new lease on life, and while changes have been made to the interior, the basic character of the building has been retained. Like many fine homes of the day, the rectory is square in plan, its central door surrounded by sidelights and a simple transom. Stone quoins at each corner accentuate the red brick and contribute to its dignity and feeling of permanence. It is a fine example of how imagination and careful planning allow an old but well-built structure to be adapted successfully to commercial use.

Although Hodge was housed in his fine rectory, his years at St Peter's were difficult ones. One of the problems was money, or the lack of it. The churchwardens were unable to pay his full salary; even the churchyard fence could not be mended and there was no 'protection from cattle.' Hodge's main problems, however, seemed to stem from an awkward but intense personality clash with William Magrath, the youngest son of the church's first rector. Magrath left St Peter's to attend the church in Streetsville. Naturally there were different views of the situation. Church records state that Magrath was prone to insist on 'his own importance,' but his daughter Mary Harris spoke of him as a dear and affectionate man who was kind to squatters who lived on his property.

In 1866 the Reverend Charles James Stewart Bethune became rector of St Peter's. His grandfather, John Bethune, was a Loyalist and the first Presbyterian minister in Upper Canada. John Bethune's family became leaders in the religious and educational life of the province. Charles Bethune had grown up in Cobourg, where his father, later Bishop Alexander Neil Bethune, was rector of St Peter's church. A prize student of Bishop John Strachan's, Charles Bethune was educated at the University of Toronto and in England.



The Old Manse, the rectory of St Peter's Church, 1556 Dundas Street West



He recognized the need for a larger church building in Erindale, and so plans were made for the construction of a new St Peter's on the same site. The church was completed in 1887 after Bethune had left for Port Hope. The new St Peter's stands just north of Dundas Street at Mississauga Road, its spire a landmark for the small community which Dr Coleman called 'one of the prettiest villages in Upper Canada.'

Most of the good remaining pre-Confederation buildings in the Erindale area were built by men who were active in the founding of St Peter's. These families were wealthy, at least by the standards of the day, and their homes were built to last. It was not that all Anglicans were rich but certainly most of the rich were Anglicans. For many years, of course, the Anglican Church was, in custom although not in law, the established church in Upper Canada. It had, for example, a huge advantage in the disposition of clergy reserves, receiving one-seventh of the waste land of the Crown. The Methodists and other denominations, while collectively outnumbering their Anglican brethren, took longer to become entrenched and it was many years before they were able to match the political and social strength of the Anglican Church.

In Erindale one of the most prestigious of St Peter's parishioners was Oliver Hammond, merchant, farmer, and for many years a justice of the peace. His imposing brick house at 2625 Hammond Road was built on land which had been owned by his wife since 1838. Early records are inconclusive, but an indenture signed in June of that year suggests that Hammond's wife, Sarah Ann Carpenter, purchased the property from her parents for £800. It could, however, have been a gift to Sarah Ann, for it is clear that her mother was anxious to see that she was financially independent. On her death in 1859 Mary Carpenter's will revealed that she had made the following provision for her daughter: 'I desire that the above money, goods and chattels ... willed to my daughter Sarah Ann Hammond shall be for her own separate use and benefit and not to be controlled or used by her present husband or any future husband and in case her present husband or any future husband should use any power they have in law, I appoint my said executors trustees to take said property heretofore devised to keep the same in trust for my said daughter.'

At some time during the 1860s Sarah Ann and Oliver built their large home. It is pictured in the 1877 *Illustrated Historical Atlas of*

the County of Peel and must have been a source of pride to them both. To the north of the house is an orchard. To the south and east broad fields lead to the horizon. A small stream meanders through the property. (The sylvan settings pictured in county atlases were paid for by the subscriber.) It is likely that what now forms the rear portion of the house was once the Hammonds' first home. A verandah originally stretched across the front of the house but, as was so often the case, it failed to withstand the rigours of a harsh climate. In recent years the front door has been recessed to form an umbrage.

Oliver Hammond died in 1874, Sarah Ann six years later. The house was left to their son Thomas, who had been farming the land with his parents for some years.

In the late 1830s, at the same time that Oliver and Sarah Ann Hammond were establishing their first homestead near Erindale, an English gentleman, his wife, and infant daughter arrived in the neighbourhood and settled on land a few miles south of the Ham-

Hammond house, 2625 Hammond Road



monds. He was Captain James Beveridge Harris, formerly of the East India Company's 24th Foot Regiment. Harris had resigned his commission in order to emigrate to Canada so that he could provide a better life for his family in that rapidly growing colony. When at the age of 78 Harris wrote his will, he was able to leave extensive holdings in land and shares in the Royal Canadian Bank and the Merchant's Bank of Canada. The family was educated, industrious, and enterprising, typical in many ways of the half-pay officers and their relatives who came to the province to settle as landed gentry.

Harris may have been lured to the area by an advertisement which appeared in the *Upper Canada Land, Mercantile and General Advertiser* on 12 August 1835. It told of an attractive property for sale 'between the Lakeshore Road and Dundas Street, 18 miles from the City of Toronto.' An 'elegant stone house, built in the first style and well adapted for any gentleman's family' was part of the property. One of the men acting as agent for the sale was James Magrath, the rector of St Peter's. The 'elegant stone house' was the work of the previous owner, Edgar Neave. It was completed except for the fact that it had no doors or windows, which meant that it was not subject to taxation.

Not long after the advertisement appeared, Harris purchased the house and the nearly two hundred acres surrounding it. He named his estate Benares, after the city in India in which he had served. By this time Harris was thirty-eight years old and his Irish wife, Elizabeth Molone, twenty-five. Their first child, Bess, had been born on board ship when the couple emigrated. Their family grew to include eight children, four boys and four girls. During these years Harris managed the farm and enjoyed the country pastimes of a gentleman farmer, such as hunting and salmon-fishing. Once a week, according to family tradition, he would walk the eighteen miles to Toronto to pick up his mail, returning home the following day. The entire family, of course, attended St Peter's.

In 1851 the Harris's oldest son died. Not long afterwards, while they and their other children were in church, their fine stone house was gutted by fire. Arson was suspected, since two of the servants and the family silver vanished at the same time. A second house was built, but six years later it too was burned to the ground. Once again arson was suspected. Captain Harris had been serving as a magistrate at the time and he believed that the fire had been set by a disreputable character to whom he had given a severe sentence.

Footprints were found around the site in the snow.

When spring came, construction began on a third house. This time it was to be of brick and built on the foundations of the first stone structure. Specifications stated that only the 'best hard-burned bricks' were to be used, 'the whole laid in Flemish bond excepting the rear wall which will be laid in English bond.' Flemish bond, a popular method of laying bricks in the early to mid-1800s, alternated headers (bricks laid at right angles to the wall, thereby exposing their ends) and stretchers (bricks laid lengthwise); English bond laid bricks in alternate rows of headers and stretchers, each header centred over a stretcher or a join.

The new Benares was completed before Christmas of 1857, but the family's pleasure in their home was destroyed by the death of their second son, James, who died after being gored by a bull. Two years after the Harris's moved into their new home their third son, Charles, also died. His death was the last in the series of blows which struck the family in the 1850s. Their daughters lived to maturity and their fourth son, Arthur, stayed on to manage the farm. In 1881 he married Mary Magrath, daughter of William and granddaughter of the first rector of St Peter's. After nearly half a century at Benares Captain Harris died in 1884 at the age of eighty-seven. His wife died one month later.

The Whiteoak family of Jalna in Mazo de la Roche's novels was modelled after the Harris family. One of the Harrises explained that 'Mazo de la Roche became a friend of the family through Mr. Livesay of the Canadian Press. She became interested in the family history and used their background for her Whiteoak family. When writing her first book of the series she also used the house as it is until her editor ... pointed out to her that she'd have to add another storey to the house to accommodate all the characters ... That's why Jalna was three storeys instead of Benares' two.'

The Harris house is now owned by the Ontario Heritage Foundation. It stands at 1503 Clarkson Road North, partially screened by trees and surrounded by a broad expanse of lawn. At the rear of the lot are two outbuildings that were part of the estate when James Harris bought it in 1835.

The trail that led south from the Harris property to the lake was a 'given' road as opposed to a road laid out on township land. It was composed of portions of the holdings of Captain Harris and his neighbour to the south, Warren Clarkson. In 1845 both Harris and

Clarkson gave land for the road and in time the trail became known as Clarkson Road.

The man for whom the road was named arrived in Upper Canada in 1808 as a lad of fifteen. He came from Albany, New York, with his father Richard and his brother Joshua and family. After a year or two in York the members of the family went their separate ways. Warren had made contacts which led him to Toronto Township, where there was the prospect of work and the chance to get his own land. Thomas Merigold, a Loyalist from New Brunswick, and his son-in-law, Benjamin Monger, were moving to settle in Toronto Township and they needed skilled help in establishing farms and business ventures. Warren Clarkson worked for Benjamin Monger and gained the business acumen that was to serve him well in later life, for this hardy pioneer produced a family whose financial demands were never-ending.

Clarkson's early years in Toronto Township were interrupted by

Benares, the inspiration for Mazo de la Roche's *Jalna*, 1503 Clarkson Road North





The verandah at Benares

service in the War of 1812. By 1814, however, he had managed to pick up enough business experience between battles to establish himself on a farm and marry. His bride was Susan Shook, the daughter of the family who had settled across the road from the Mongers. Warren and Susan Clarkson made their home on one hundred acres of land just north of Lakeshore Road. The first of their children, George, was born in 1818. One year after George was born Warren and Susan completed construction of their first small house. The birth of a daughter, Charlotte, in 1822 prompted the completion of a larger house where in due course two more sons were born, William Warren in 1828 and Henry Shook in 1834.

Warren Clarkson did not confine his energies to working the farm. He operated a general store on his property. It stood beside the trail that led from Erindale past the Harris farm to the Lakeshore Road. A few miles to the east, where the Credit River flows into Lake Ontario, a promising village had begun to grow, and there Clarkson built another store in order to take advantage of what seemed to be the assured prosperity of the place. The prosperous port at the mouth of the Credit was one of the largest on the Great Lakes, and for many years it had been serving farmers in the area, as vessels made regular stops to load grain. It was here that Warren Clarkson

had first stayed on his arrival in Toronto Township, at the government inn run by Thomas Ingersoll. The innkeeper was well enough known in his time but history was to dictate that his real fame would arise from the fact that he was the father of Laura Secord.

Through the first half of the nineteenth century Warren Clarkson prospered. At the same time, however, his family was growing and, in direct relation, so were his problems. In the 1930s a bundle of letters was found in the Clarkson homestead which testified to the fact that even a century ago young people were not always industrious, mannerly, or respectful of their parents.

The Clarkson letters were written by the three older children, George, William, and Charlotte, to their younger brother, Henry. Henry was the solace of his father in that he held a job and stayed out of debt and jail. George farmed in Milton with limited success and William accumulated debts. Charlotte, since her brothers administered some property which was hers, depended on them for

Clarkson house, just north of Lakeshore Road



pocket-money and was always short of it.

From Milton George wrote to Henry, usually asking for money. One letter, however, dated November 1855, seems to indicate that George was marrying without his father's knowledge or consent: 'Sir - I want you and Charlotte to come up on Monday night for I am going to get married on Tuesday ... I wish you would come to Milton ... and don't goe any where else for wee want to keep it as sly as Possible ... Try and go through Palermo after Dark so no one will see you at all.' A letter written two years later suggests that things were not going well, for George asked his brother to 'Tell father to sell the plase iff possible so that I can get out of truble.' In the spring of 1858 a baby was born to George's wife and shortly thereafter George fell ill. By December the family was in dire straits and he wrote to Henry: 'If you could lend me \$100 I shuld be very glad to get it ... Debrah and Baby is well ... It is as mischevious a child as you ever saw. I wish you could come and see her for she looks jest like you.'

Henry was unable to send any money to his brother, and in March 1859 George and his family moved back to his father's farm. Warren Clarkson paid his son's debts but it was not surprising that, as Charlotte remarked, 'George's trouble frets him [Warren] all but to death.' By June the situation seemed no better, according to Charlotte: 'the old folks cannot bare George here another summer. He nearly killed one of father's horses he worked it so hard ... do not write anything to George that you dont want told again for he tells every thing he knows and more too.'

Warren Clarkson's wife, Susan, died in 1858 and the widower married again two years later. His new wife was Mary Ann Kirkus, a widow from Richmond Hill. She is frequently referred to in the letters which George, William, and Charlotte wrote to Henry as 'the old woman.' Mary Ann shared with Warren his concern about his grown children as problems accumulated with the years.

While George was back on the family farm causing trouble, William was now deeply in debt. In 1857 his wife, Lorenda, was pregnant. This news was relayed to Henry, who was in Minnesota training to be a surveyor and working as a foreman for a railway construction firm, by both Charlotte and George, each in his or her own style. Charlotte wrote: 'you are in a fair way for being an uncle.' George wrote: 'Lorenda is Nock up as high as Gilderoyes Kite.' William, because of his debts, was constantly on the move in

an effort to keep out of jail. He went to Ohio, returned to the homestead, was committed to jail, jumped bail, and left with Lorenda for New York State. Warren, in spite of his exasperation, was nevertheless sorry to see his son depart. Charlotte summed it up: 'Father felt very bad to see William go off for he said perhaps he would never see him again for if he got sick William could not come and see him.'

Charlotte was continually without funds. She wrote to steady Henry for ten dollars or so, adding on one occasion that 'I might as well get a fart from a dead man as to get any money from father.' Charlotte married in 1859. Prior to the wedding George wrote to Henry, speculating on what he would do 'iff she does marry that ass. She shant never darking my door.'

Poor industrious Warren Clarkson deserved better. His worries, however, did nothing to affect his longevity, for he lived until the age of 89.

Clarkson barn



Of the three Clarkson sons, only Henry measured up to his father's expectations. After about three years in Minnesota he returned to Canada in 1860, working as a produce merchant in Toronto and Port Credit and helping his father to manage the farm. When Warren Clarkson died in 1882, Henry inherited the bulk of the estate, including the house and outbuildings.

For many years the Clarkson house remained in the family but by the 1930s it had fallen into a state of near ruin. Fortunately it was purchased in 1936 by Major John Barnett, a man whose passionate interest in history led him to undertake the gradual restoration of the house and the surrounding property. Where indiscriminate logging had denuded the nearby woodlands, the Barnetts planted over five thousand trees. Today some thirty-eight distinct species survive. The house that Warren Clarkson completed in 1825 still stands at the end of a long driveway. His first house, built six years earlier, is joined to the main block by a spinning-room that Clarkson added in 1857.

Hidden in the trees behind the house is a splendid barn that dates from the mid-1820s. One of the many legends surrounding the escape of William Lyon Mackenzie after the rebellion suggests that he hid in this barn for a time, although there is no mention of this area in Mackenzie's own account of his flight. If, however, the barn did shelter one of the fleeing rebels, in all probability that man would have been Joseph Clarkson, a nephew of Warren's and one of Mackenzie's loyal followers. Joseph Clarkson too was charged with high treason and fled to the United States, but no further account of his escape has been found.

In the 1790s there were possibly 600 Mississauga Indians in the Credit River area. Basically a nomadic people, they moved about in pursuit of game or fish, establishing villages and then moving on. For them the advent of increasing numbers of Europeans brought some benefits primarily from the fur trade, but there were also liabilities in the form of new diseases which began to decimate their ranks. In 1805 the chiefs of the Mississaugas signed a purchase agreement with the Crown in which the Indians surrendered 84,000 acres of land along Lake Ontario for £1000. By this agreement they retained the lands on either side of the Credit River, a mile in extent altogether, for their exclusive use, with hunting and fishing rights throughout the territory. In 1818, however, the chiefs surrendered the Credit lands and by 1820 they had given up all but two hundred

acres as well as their fishing rights. The government then made plans to establish a permanent village for the Mississauga and in 1826 constructed thirty log houses on a site near the present Mississauga Golf Club. By 1837 there were in the Mississauga village some fifty log houses each of which would hold two families.

Peter Jones, a young Methodist missionary and a Mississauga himself, came to help his people become established in the new village. Jones was described in his formal attire as a chief: 'a coat of deer skin, dressed in the Indian method without the hair, of a golden colour, and as soft as glove leather ... The head-dress - a valuable silk, or fine cotton handkerchief, in turban form, worn by some tribes with feathers. Leggins, - reaching to the hip, and ornamented on the sides, serve as trowsers. Mocassins - curiously ornamented with porcupine quills, complete the drawing room habit.'

Jones had the assistance of his brother John, and shortly thereafter the remarkable influence of another Methodist missionary,

James Wilcox's inn, 32 Front Street, Port Credit



Egerton Ryerson, was felt. Ryerson, who established the Ontario educational system, was instrumental in arranging for the construction of a schoolhouse and a Methodist chapel in the village. He considered it essential to erect the chapel quickly, for the Anglicans had ideas in the same direction. Both groups were actively competing for the souls of the native people, who had recently been converted to Christianity. The chapel, built after the settlement was established, is located today at Peter and Lake Streets. It is important more for its history than for its architecture, for it has been altered and moved from its original site, but beneath the present stucco exterior is frame and possibly log construction. For many years it has been the Masonic Hall.

James Wilcox was an Englishman whose fortunes were tied to those of Port Credit and so prospered and declined with the village. In 1850, in the period of the lake port's prosperity, he built a fine two-storey inn overlooking the harbour, and here for the following six years came sailors, travellers, and farmers bringing their grain to be shipped. Upstairs the ballroom could double as sleeping accommodation when other rooms were full. In 1855, however, the Great Western Railway was opened through Port Credit. The shipment of goods by rail was much easier, and the decline of the port set in. This spelled disaster for Wilcox. The number of people visiting the harbour diminished and Wilcox converted his inn to a two-family dwelling. Conflicting local histories suggest that the hotel at one point served as a temperance inn for sailors, a contradiction in terms that provides another possible explanation of its commercial failure. For many years after his inn went out of business Wilcox earned his living as a sailor. The census of 1871 shows that he was still following that occupation at that time. Today his inn stands, beautifully restored, at 32 Front Street. It is now used as an office. In the latter part of the nineteenth century some of the schooners which had formerly been used for shipping became involved in stone-hooking, carrying stone from the bottom of the lake to be used in construction in Toronto.

In 1808, the year in which Warren Clarkson had come to Upper Canada from Albany, his neighbour, Lewis Bradley, arrived in Toronto Township from New Brunswick. Bradley received a Crown grant of more than two hundred acres and promptly set about meeting the settlement requirements. Less than three years later, Samuel Smith, a justice of the peace, spoke on Bradley's behalf: 'the

settling duty has been done on lot 28 in the 3rd concession South Side Dundas Street ... a house twenty feet by sixteen has been erected and five acres cleared and under fence ... as also the road cleared in front of said lot.' Bradley's land stretched south from the Lakeshore Road to Lake Ontario on the lot immediately to the east of the farm purchased a few years later by Clarkson.

Bradley was a Loyalist. The years of the American Revolution had meant turmoil and disruption for him and his family. His father, Richard Bradley, was a commissary at Savannah, Georgia, a civilian who served the needs of the military in that area. He died, possibly when the revolutionary forces successfully attacked Savannah in 1777. He left a widow and two sons, William and Lewis. In time Mrs Bradley remarried, her new husband John Jenkins, a lieutenant and deputy muster master in the Loyalist forces in South Carolina. When the war came to an end, the family fled to New York City and then to New Brunswick with other Loyalists. When Fredericton became the capital of New Brunswick, the land adjacent to it was greatly in demand. With requests from government officials and from other Loyalist families the best sites were being taken up, and thus Lewis Bradley and Thomas Merigold, with three other families, decided to relocate in Upper Canada. At this time Bradley was thirty-seven years old.

Bradley and Merigold, the leader of the small group from New Brunswick, received adjacent land grants in Toronto Township. This proved a convenient arrangement because Bradley's wife, Elizabeth, was a daughter of Merigold. The Bradleys may not have married until after Lewis had settled on his farm. Their first child, William F. Brown Bradley, was born circa 1815 when his father was forty-four. In time three more sons and two daughters were born to the Bradleys. About 1830 the Bradleys replaced the original house referred to in the statement of settlement with the trim frame building on the property today.

Little is known of Lewis and Elizabeth Bradley during their life in Toronto Township. They were devout Wesleyan Methodists and must have welcomed the itinerant ministers who travelled through the countryside. When Lewis Bradley died in 1843, his obituary in the *Christian Guardian* of 26 April stated that he 'raised a numerous and respectable family ... He was a very affectionate father and kind and attentive husband – charitable and liberal – always cheer-

ful and lively and was highly esteemed by all who had the pleasure of his acquaintance.'

A few years after Lewis's death Elizabeth married Major John Button, after whom the village of Buttonville in York Region was named. In 1846 the Bradley house was sold to Bartholomew C. Beardsley, whose wife, Mary Jenkins, was a half sister of Bradley. Today the Bradley house is a historic-house museum under the supervision of the Mississauga Heritage Foundation and city of Mississauga and is open to the public from April through November. Before its restoration it was moved a short distance from its original location by the lake to a site near the intersection of Meadowwood and Orr Roads in Clarkson.

Beside the Bradley house and awaiting restoration is the Anchorage, probably built by James Taylor but given its nautical name by John Skynner, whose naval career began in 1795 and took him throughout the Mediterranean for forty-three years until he retired

Bradley house, near Meadowwood and Orr Roads in Clarkson



as a commander. Like the Bradley house the Anchorage has been moved. The original location of the Skynner land was at the foot of Southdown Road. This land was deeded from the Crown to Stephen Jarvis, who came from New Brunswick, as did the Bradleys and Merigolds. Jarvis related that he came to York in 1808 to obtain land. After receiving twelve hundred acres he returned to Fredericton for his family. For part of the journey he used the same log canoe which Thomas Merigold had used to reach York. Although the Jarvises are mainly associated with Toronto, they also had long family ties with Toronto Township. Frederick Starr Jarvis, Stephen's son, raised his twelve children there, and the Jarvis family did not move to Toronto until after his death in 1852.

It was Frederick Starr Jarvis who in 1832 sold the land on which the Anchorage was built to James Taylor. Taylor held it for six years before he sold it to Skynner. The building was built either by Taylor during those six years or by Skynner, who like so many military men would have had a strong preference for the Regency style in which the Anchorage was built. The house is now standing empty until funds permit its restoration.

The city of Mississauga today encompasses many former villages, each of which had a distinct identity, history, and unique atmosphere. Even in the mid-1800s, however, there were connections between these disparate communities brought about by marriages and ties of family. A contemporary account of a wedding which took place in 1851 brings vividly to life many of the men and women whose houses are mentioned in the preceding pages. This description of the marriage of Henry Skynner and Mary Adamson, which took place in the Jarvis home, Brunswick Farm, was written by Frederick Starr Jarvis. He includes comments upon all who attended – and even some who were absent, such as the lady who 'had no servant and could not leave her brat.' Among those present were Mrs Dixie, the former Anna Skynner, and her daughter, 'Dixie being called to a patient,' and Captain Harris and his daughter.

Jarvis writes: 'The bride came downstairs and took my arm, Louisa Jarvis and Fred Forster, Miss Adamson and John Skynner, Julia and Charles Adamson as bridesmaid and groomsman and formed in the middle of the drawing room. Parson and self in front ... Henry said "I will" before the first question of "will thou take this woman etc." and of course had to say it at the finish which made quite a laugh and revived Mary's thoughts and her colour ... I

shed a few tears and Mrs Dixie had a nice cry.' The wedding table was laden with 'Tea, coffee, two turkeys, two geese, two ducks, six chickens, two hams, tarts, jellies, blamonges... whipped cream, Italian salad, raisins and almonds, apples, peaches and grapes, Port, sherry, toddy, whiskey and cold water.' The evening ended with 'Hurrahs, hip, hip and health to all good lasses,' but not before dancing and 'supper' had followed the wedding feast. Jarvis concludes with an account of his coup: 'Miss Adamson had a nice tete-a-tete with John Skynner as I locked them up in the parlour together.'