

A Brief History of the Town of Newmarket

In June, 1800, Timothy Rogers, a Vermont Quaker, explored the area around the Holland River and up to Lake Simcoe to find a suitable location for a contemplated Quaker settlement. The Quakers were disturbed as a result of difficulties encountered when this peaceful sect refused to take part in the rioting and bloodshed of the American Revolutionists. In 1801, Rogers, leading several Quaker families, left their homes in Vermont and Pennsylvania and secured land grants of 8,000 acres located at the east end of lots 93, 94, and 95 along Yonge Street in the former Townships of Whitchurch and King. It was easy for them to see the potential in these fertile rolling lands, through which flowed the Holland River, an important trading artery for both aboriginals and fur traders.

Having arrived in the spring, these first Quaker settlers immediately began the arduous task of clearing the land for their homes and farms. Indeed, By Christmas of 1801, Joseph Hill had constructed a mill on the Holland River at what is now Fairy Lake, around which the settlement to be known as Newmarket sprouted. Over the years, Mr. Hill also built a tannery and the first store and house, as well as additional mills. It is unfortunate that this enterprising man, embittered over the terms of an 1804 sale of the north half of lot 93 to Elisha Beman, returned saddened and disappointed to the United States in 1812.



*Hill Trading Post,
Main and Water Streets,
1801*

Elisha Beman, through his marriage to Esther Sayre Robinson, the widow of Christopher Robinson, a distinguished United Empire Loyalist and member of the Legislative Assembly, gained an entree to the establishment and preferential treatment through the Family Compact. When with his stepsons, Peter Robinson, John Beverly Robinson and William Beverly Robinson, Beman obtained control of the mill, he quickly added distilling and trading businesses, thus increasing his holdings and making a

significant contribution to the economic growth of the community then known as "Upper Yonge Street". It is interesting to note that Peter Robinson founded the village of Holland Landing, just north of Newmarket, as well as the City of Peterborough, which bears his name.

The contributions by the early arrivals to this community are acknowledged through the town's practice over the years of naming streets in their honour. You may already be familiar with the names of many of the Town's forefathers, gleaned by walks in your neighbourhood or drives through the Town. Let us introduce some of them to you now.

In 1805 John **Bogart** built a saw-mill where the community of Bogarttown is today. This was followed by the construction of a grist mill in 1806. Eli **Gorham** built a carding and woollen mill in 1808. It is reputed to be the first such mill in Upper Canada. Timothy **Millard**, who arrived in 1812, constructed a grist mill on Queen Street. **William Roe**, at the age of 17, was employed by the Receiver General when war broke out with the Americans in 1812. He was entrusted with a considerable portion of government funds, which he managed to hide from the invading forces upon the capture of York in 1813.



*Bogart Farm House,
Mullock Drive, 1890s*

Arriving in 1809, Dr. Christopher **Beswick** was the first physician in the community. Dr. Beswick has the distinction of living to the age of 118. He donated considerable property to the Anglican Church. Dr. Beswick is buried in the Eagle Street cemetery as are a number of early residents of the Town. Most of the early Quaker settlers are laid to rest in the Orthodox Quaker Burying Ground and others in the Hicksite Burying Ground, both on Yonge Street.

In its first 50 years, the community grew and prospered. Farmers' markets were held regularly on Saturdays and were well-attended because purchasers were spared the long journey to York. Although it was essentially an agricultural community, it provided a busy centre for commerce and small industry. It is believed that the name Newmarket evolved as a result of the trading that took place, while York (not Toronto) was the 'old market', this new centre of commerce became the "New Market".

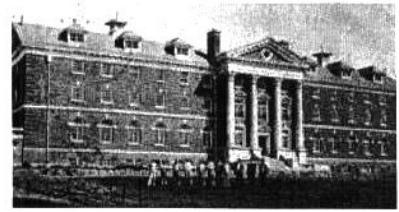


Millard Funeral Home & Furniture Store, Main Street, c. 1910, now Roadhouse and Rose Funeral Home, 157 Main Street South. The J. H. Millard block was built in the 1870s for Millard's Cabinet Making and Undertaking business. It was remodelled c. 1920 in a Tudor style after being purchased by N. J. Roadhouse, who moved his business from the corner of Main and Queen Streets.

Many factors helped to shape this growing community. One which had a significant impact was the Rebellion of 1837. Newmarket was a focal point of discontent against the manipulations of the governing Family Compact, of whom it was said "were robbing the country". This anger grew to the explosive point with the general election in 1836. When the new "Constitutional Reform Party of Upper Canada" was defeated, and grievances of the settlers were not addressed, there was no holding back the tide of rebellion. The rebellion was quickly crushed and William Lyon MacKenzie fled to asylum in the United States. Two participants in the uprising were hung, one of whom, Samuel Lount, was from the Newmarket area. The death warrant was signed by Sir John Beverly Robinson.

By the mid-1800s the fur trade had come to an end and the aboriginals were no longer trading along the Holland River. A local newspaper, the "New Era", was started in 1852 and in 1853, with Erastus Jackson as its editor, was renamed the "Newmarket Era". With the coming of the steam railway the same year, Newmarket experienced another surge of prosperity and growth making it the most important village north of Toronto.

Newmarket was incorporated as a village in 1857 with a population of 700. Schools were built, many small industries were started, dry goods and grocery stores flourished. In 1880, with a population of 2,000, Newmarket became a Town and William Cane was elected as its first Mayor. In later years, Mr. Cane's sash and door factory would become the first in Canada to manufacture lead pencils.



Pickering College, 1921

The Town suffered many catastrophes over the years including several major fires which destroyed most of the original frame structures on Main Street. Diseases such as typhoid, diphtheria and smallpox took their toll. In 1878 a flood destroyed 10 bridges and residents were without communication for three days. Although these disasters halted progress in the Town for a time, the ultimate result was improvements in building construction, street lighting, firefighting services, water supply, and health and sanitation measures.

As the twentieth century dawned, many significant events had taken place world-wide which had their effect on many aspects of everyday life. The Industrial Revolution, begun in Britain, marked a change from small cottage industry to production on a larger, more cost efficient basis. The development of electricity, telephones, automobiles and radio communication made life easier and created a whole new marketplace. And in Newmarket, industry grew and prospered, among the more notable, the Davis Tannery, Office Specialty and the Cane Furniture and Pencil Factory.

Newmarket benefited from technology with the advent of the Electric Railway in 1902. The railway ran from Toronto to Newmarket and in 1906 was extended north to the trendy summer resort of Jackson's Point. Newmarket was experiencing a boom, which was to last until the onset of the Great Depression in 1930.

The attempt to build a canal linking Lake Simcoe to the Holland River during the years 1906 to 1911 was one of the foremost topics of controversy on Parliament Hill. This

project was apparently entered into with an amazing lack of foresight, there being insufficient water to operate it, thus totally impractical. The scandal brought about as a result of this project and the wasteful expenditure of a large sum of government money contributed significantly to the defeat of the Liberal Government in 1911. With today's advances in engineering and technology, this idea could now be within the realm of possibility.

By the 1950s the post-war development boom was well underway. New subdivisions were established and Newmarket experienced a period of tremendous growth. Between 1950 and 1970 Newmarket's population more than doubled, growing from 5,000 to 11,000.

County Government was replaced by Regional Government in 1971 and as a result Newmarket acquired a portion of lands on its north boundary from the Township of East Gwillimbury, on its west boundary from the Township of King and on the south and east boundary from the Township of Whitchurch. Newmarket's present boundaries are as follows: On the west, Bathurst Street; on the east, Hwy 404; on the north, one lot south of Green Lane; and on the south, one lot north of St. John's Sideroad.

The Town's more recent growth has been accompanied by the expansion of services, facilities and programs to accommodate the physical, social and educational needs of its citizens. New commercial areas have been expanded to meet the demands of the residents for a greater array of goods and services. Many new industries have come to Newmarket, bringing with them increased job opportunities.

Newmarket's numerous parks and recreational facilities offer a wide range of activities for all ages, from exercise programs to microwave cooking, summer day camps and P.A. Day activities for youngsters, or simply the quiet enjoyment of a stroll through Fairy Lake or one of our passive parks. Many community groups and sports associations make use of the community centres and



Fairy Lake, 2004

arenas for a variety of programs.

Newmarket's Settlers

In December, 1801 there must have been a celebration at Joseph Hill's mill in the little clearing in the forest that was to become Newmarket.

Just imagine it! After the long trek to this isolated frontier, settlers had to clear enough of the virgin forest to plant a small crop between the stumps, build cabins for the coming winter, bring in firewood, hunt for meat, and probably last thing in the fall, dam the river, clear a mill site and build the little mill.

That first bag of flour ground from wheat carefully harvested from between the stumps must have symbolized a hard-won victory over this forbidding forest.

Joseph Hill was Newmarket's first settler and his mill – a small wooden building with two millstones between which he ground wheat – produced its first bushel of flour in the week before the Christmas of 1801. The mill was situated on the west bank of the river just south of today's Water Street. James Kinsey was the miller who ground the wheat.



*Original Hill's Mill,
Main and Water Streets,
1801*

Hill arrived with settlers from Vermont under the leadership of Timothy Rogers. Near his mill, Joseph Hill built a store and a frame house to the west of that near the present location of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church.

An ambitious man who saw the commercial potential of this site where the river converged with two great Indian trails, Hill soon became a rival of another settler-entrepreneur who planned to control the "new market" and its crossroads. His name was Elisha Beman, and he too was an ambitious American. However, Beman had

managed to get himself firmly connected by marriage to members of the powerful Family Compact ruling circle.

Shortly after his arrival in 1803, Beman purchased the mill, store and house from Hill. Hill retained a sawmill on the east side of the dam, and in 1804 built a tannery on a creek crossing today's Gorham Street. But Hill neglected to get legal title to the land. When Beman discovered this, he acquired the site and evicted Hill.

Hill had more bad luck in store for him. He had taken a partner who had fled New York leaving debts behind. The claimants found him and sued both partners in Upper Canadian courts. Although the man was not a partner in the mill, his debtors won a judgment against it. In 1812 Hill's property was seized and put up for auction. Peter Robinson, Elisha Beman's eldest step-son, acquired it.

Hill was a ruined man and ever after bitterly claimed he had been done in by an act of judicial robbery. When war broke out in 1812, he refused to take an Oath of Allegiance and Newmarket's first settler left for Pennsylvania.

The Market Town

Newmarket has always been a market town. That's why its Main Street is considered the heart of the community. The Town was founded as a trading post and milling centre in 1801 where the river cuts the old native trail (Water and Main Streets).



*Main Street Newmarket,
1890s*

Within a few years, three powerful and well-connected trading factions developed in the little frontier community. The fur trade added extra profit to the business they did with the Quaker settlers who cleared farms along Yonge Street.

The three were Elisha Beman and his stepsons, Peter and William Robinson, all with strong ties to the colonial government known as the Family Compact; John Cawthra, the son of one of Toronto's richest merchants; and William Roe, who started trading in 1814 under a huge elm just west of Main Street and had powerful government friends. All three built permanent trading posts at the south end of Main Street.

The community got its name from the "new market" thus established for local settlers and transient fur trappers.

It's impossible to say now when regular trading days developed in Newmarket where area farmers would sell their produce and livestock to local shoppers, butchers and vegetable buyers from Toronto and other communities. We know a farmers' market was operating in 1855, just two years after the railroad arrived and three after the founding of the newspaper. It brought a lot of money into the village and much of it was spent by visiting farmers in Main Street stores.

Residents could see they had better provide improved facilities or risk having the markets move to another community. By the 1860s the need had become pressing and land was purchased between Timothy and Botsford Streets, where a shed was erected.

By the 1880s new facilities were again needed and a two-storey town hall and market building costing \$6,000 was built. It opened on July 1, 1883.

Newmarket had maintained its position as THE MARKET TOWN north of Toronto.

The farmers' market operated in what we today call the Old Town Hall until the 1940s. By then, Newmarket was fully established as the area's commercial centre.

The First Railroad in Upper Canada

On the first Saturday of June 1853, the first train puffed into Newmarket on the tracks of the first railroad built in Upper Canada. Called the Ontario, Huron & Simcoe Railway, it eventually linked Toronto to Collingwood on Georgian Bay, but that June day the tracks ended here.

The coming of the railroad also cinched Newmarket's role as the business centre of the vast and wealthy hinterland north of Toronto. Communities missed by the tracks withered and disappeared, those with stations grew and prospered.

Businesses moved here, mills and factories were built and the population grew. It has never stopped growing.

The railway station was replaced with a larger building twice in the first half century. Today's railway station was built in 1899 and has been restored by the Chamber of Commerce as a symbol of our business success.

The Ghost Canal

Farmers and businessmen from all over the Newmarket district, angry at skyrocketing railroad freight rates, met in the Town Hall on Market Square to look for cheaper ways to get their products to market.

Their Member of Parliament, Sir William Mulock, convinced them a canal was the answer and so the Newmarket Canal was born.

Newmarket's civic leaders went to Ottawa to lobby for a canal linking to Lake Simcoe and the Trent Waterway. With Mulock as its chief advocate in Cabinet, the canal was approved and construction started in 1906. It was almost complete in the summer of 1912 – three lift locks, three swing bridges and a turning basin – when the new government of Robert Borden cancelled the project.

Instead of having a downtown on a busy tourist waterway, all we are left with is a turning basin at the Tannery Centre filled in to become the parking lot and an almost completed but never used ghost canal with its locks and bridges slowly deteriorating and disappearing.

Streetcar to Toronto

In 1899 the rails of an electric street railway system – today we'd call it a streetcar line – pushed up Yonge Street and reached Newmarket. The tracks came into town in the area of today's Cane Parkway, and then went up Main Street. First terminal was the Railroad Hotel (now King George Hotel), Timothy and Main Streets, but later the tracks were moved west of Main Street and a station was built on Botsford Street across from the Old Town Hall. The tracks eventually continued north to Sutton West.

The “radial” brought tourists flocking to town. They came for the Saturday farmers' market, which was famous throughout the area, and special trains were run from Toronto for the North York Agricultural Fair held each September in Newmarket. The street railway also carried freight, including locally-produced farm produce, to Toronto markets.

Better highways and cheaper cars and trucks eventually put the line out of business. It was discontinued north of Richmond Hill in the early 1930s, and in 1947 the tracks between North Toronto and Richmond Hill were torn up.

An Army Town

In August, 1940 Newmarket Mayor Dr. S.J. Boyd, a Main Street doctor, told Ottawa the town was willing to provide a site for a wartime army camp. Within six weeks, the Newmarket Basic Training Centre had been built. It consisted of 36 buildings including a large drill hall, barracks, cookhouses, messes, guardrooms, recreation halls, and canteens. An infirmary, churches and other buildings were added later. Thousands of soldiers were trained for overseas action at the Newmarket base and the camp payroll and supply purchases kept Main Street prosperous during the war years.

Today, the drill hall is the York Curling Club, and many of the barracks and other buildings which were converted to peacetime uses can still be seen on nearby streets.

Robert Simpson

Robert Simpson started his business life as a 22-year-old shop boy in a Main Street general store in Newmarket, and finished it as founder and owner of one of Canada's greatest mercantile empires.

As a boy, Robert worked in his father's general store in Inverness, Scotland. When he immigrated to Canada, he chose Newmarket as his home because a cousin, Mrs. James Sutherland, already lived here. Robert went to work in the Sutherland family store, D. Sutherland & Sons.

After two years, Simpson and friend William Trent founded Simpson & Trent Groceries, Boots, Shoes and Dry Goods. That was in 1858 and they opened on the north-west corner of Main and Timothy Streets. In 1862, Trent went his own way and Simpson took M.W. Bogart as a partner. A shrewd businessman, Simpson became noted among farmers for borrowing from them in the fall. He gave notes for the loans, against which the farmers bought merchandise from his store during the lean winter and spring months. To sweeten the pot, he paid 10 to 15 per cent interest against the prevailing six

per cent bank rate. He still came out ahead because the farmers invariably overspent the notes and wound up indebted to the store.

Before fire destroyed their store in October of 1870, the firm moved to larger premises across the street. Within two months, Simpson dissolved the partnership, rebuilt and reopened as the Robert Simpson Company. The following June he moved again, this time to Queen Street in downtown Toronto. From that beginning, The Robert Simpson Company grew into a national department store chain and made Robert one of the wealthiest merchants in Canada.

Terry Carter, Newmarket Historical Society

Newmarket, Then and Now



Panoramic View of Newmarket, 1911*



Main Street, 1890*



Main Street, 2008

* Courtesy of Newmarket Historical Society Archives

Who Was Elman W. Campbell?

Does a town reflect its people or does the life of its people reflect the town? In the case of Elman W. Campbell, it's impossible to say.

Best remembered now for his involvement with the Newmarket Historical Society, Elman W. Campbell is credited with obtaining a permanent site for the museum that bears his name. A local man, discovering who Elman W. Campbell was brings the history of Newmarket into sharp focus. Through Mr. Campbell's book "Newmarket Some Early Memories" you feel that you know both the town and the man.



Elman W. Campbell

As a child, Elman swam in Fairy Lake and fished off its floating bridge. In 1913 a referendum was held to decide which of several companies would provide electricity to the growing town. Elman and his friends ran between MacKenzie and Mann, and Ontario Hydro to get the free toast that both companies handed out to prove that their electricity made the best. Elman was a pupil at Alexander Muir School when the armistice was signed November 11, 1918. He stood with the other Boy Scouts, hat held out, to receive packages of firecrackers for the celebration. A mischievous boy, he remembered that they received more than their share – probably because the sea of uniforms confused the town officials.

The fireworks display on November 11, 1918 at Specialty Flats was amazing as was the celebration the following May 24th. It seemed that a number of firecrackers didn't go off due to missing wicks. Elman went November 12th, gathered them up, and made new wicks for them. The following May he and his friends had the 'biggest celebration in town.'

Elman's life was linked closely with changes and growth in Newmarket. When he started high school in September 1920, the school was small and didn't have indoor plumbing. The school population grew and the afternoon he wrote his final examination for Grade 13 - June 30, 1926 - he was part of the ceremony laying the corner stone for

the school expansion. He dropped a penny into the copper box time capsule buried during the ceremony.

In high school, Elman was active in the Cadet Corp and was part of the honour guard for the November 11, 1924 dedication service of the Memorial Pillars for those lost in the Great War. At the University of Toronto, he was active in IOTC. When Elman returned to Newmarket, he became a successful main street merchant and was active in the Chamber of Commerce of the town. An indication of his stature in the community can be seen in the honour he and his wife Betty received in April 1980. They were named Senior King and Queen for Newmarket's Centennial Celebration and were crowned by Mayor Twinney at a dance at St John's Parish Hall.

Elman witnessed all the changes to Newmarket over the years, and was interested in preserving the memories. I think that he was successful. To know who Elman W. Campbell was is to know Newmarket.

Peggy McChesney, Newmarket essay contest winner