

A WALKING TOUR OF THE VALLEY

1 **YONGE STREET**

Yonge Street was an important highway in pioneer days. It was surveyed and laid out under Governor Simcoe and went from York (later Toronto) to Lake Simcoe. By 1794, it extended just north of Shepherd Avenue. In this period a road was only a path 20 feet wide that was cut through the woods and cleared of brush.

In 1807, Yonge Street began to be turnpiked – stumps and boulders were removed from the road and drainage ditches were ploughed along the sides. Passengers travelling by stage coach in these times had to get out and help push the vehicle when it became stuck in mud during the rain. Later the road was “macadamized” which meant surfacing it with broken stone to give better drainage.

The section of Yonge Street that passed through the Village of York Mills could not be built straight down the hill because the land was too swampy. Instead it detoured down the Donwoods Drive hill, along Donino Avenue running north and up Old Yonge Street. Early travellers recalled the stretch of the highway as being indescribably bad after a rain. The first inns in York Mills were located on this old route. There was a two story inn erected on Donino Avenue in 1830 which was run by Mr. Ross.

In 1835 Yonge Street was straightened after the swamp at the foot of the hill was drained and filled. After that, travellers took the new route and the Donino Inn lost many of its guests. It was eventually turned into a private home for the Hogg family.

2 **JOLLY MILLER**

In the early days of the 19th century travellers on the stage coach that ran between York (Toronto) and Holland Landing welcomed the sight of an inn.

Here they could rest and quench their thirst with locally distilled whiskey. The mail was dropped off, the horses watered and rubbed down before the stage coach set off again, picking up some additional passengers. There are records of an inn at York Mills as early as 1812.

The first inn to be built in the area after Yonge Street was straightened was Anderson’s Tavern, erected about 1836. The stable and driving sheds were located across the street from the inn. This structure burnt down in 1856 and a new inn was built a few years later to replace it. This new building is the one we know today as the Jolly Miller. The inn has had many owners over the years. Wallace Carson, an Irishman was innkeeper from 1872 to 1889. In 1889 Scotsman David Birrell took over and ran it until 1936. The bridge on Mill Street around the corner from the tavern is named after him.

During the prohibition years “The Miller” was said to have been a gambling den with crap and blackjack tables, guarded by a man on a stepladder holding a sawed off shotgun. Today it is still a lively gathering place.

The building was constructed in Domestic Georgian Survival style. It has yellow brick corner decoration. Note the five-bay facade and broad gabled roof. The original locally made red brick is now covered by a false stone front.

3 **DON RIVER WEST BRANCH**

Though it is now little more than a shallow stream for much of the year, the west branch of the Don that runs through the valley was once a navigable river. The Coureurs de Bois used to paddle up the Don to York Mills and then put their boats on wagons that were taken to Holland Landing. It is thought the Colonel Simcoe breakfasted at this river crossing on October 14, 1793 when he returned from his explorations to Georgian Bay.

4 **17 MILL STREET**

George Pratt, a miller, built this house between 1886 and 1890. This late Victorian style farm house was one of the earliest in the province to be constructed of poured concrete. It was also one of the first houses in Hogg's Hollow to receive hydro and telephone services. Pratt's son Ollie was quoted as saying "my dad probably built the house from his imagination."

Pratt's mill was located at the corner of Brookfield and Donino. Gypsies were seen camping on the property in the early years of this century.

5 **NUMBER ONE AND NUMBER FIVE OLD YONGE**

6 The origins of these two houses go back more than a century to 1878 when they were built or brought to this site by Jim Whitton. He was the son of John Whitton who operated a slaughter house at Yonge and York Mills where the Shell Station is now. Both houses have had substantial changes and additions over the years. Number five is a wood frame stucco one story dwelling. Because of its 9 ½ foot ceilings, unusual for a cottage of this period, it is thought it may have been used as a religious meeting place.

Number One is a two story building, the front section being the original house. At one time these houses were supposed to have been rented to mill workers.

7 **METROPOLITAN TORONTO SCHOOL BOARD**

This building served as York Mills Public School until 1982 when it was extensively renovated to become the Metropolitan Toronto School Board. It was the fourth school to serve the community since the first log cabin school was built about 1805 behind the present Jolly Miller Tavern. This building was constructed in 1926 and named "The Baron Renfrew School." This name was eventually changed to York Mills Public School. It was with great regret in the community that this

active and historic school was closed due to declining enrolment in 1982.

The property is now however very attractive due to extensive landscaping and careful renovation which has retained the character of the original building. The York Mills Valley Association holds its annual meeting in what was once the boiler room of the York Mills School!

8 **BROOKFIELD PARK**

Currently the site of the Valley Fair, T-Ball and baseball games, this area was once Hogg's brick yard.

9 **41 BROOKFIELD ROAD**

"Brookfeild" was the name that Dr. Robert Dawson Rudolf and his wife gave to their 3 story Tudor residence, built in 1923. This was the first house on the street and it was a copy of one that the Rudolf's had owned previously on Farnham Avenue.

Dr. Rudolf was descended from one of the families that founded Lunenburg, Nova Scotia in 1752. He was a general practitioner and professor of therapeutics at University of Toronto. Mrs. Rudolf, described as a gracious gentlewoman was descended from the English painter Charles Towne. She hand painted the tiles in the fireplace and bathrooms.

A flower garden and vegetable garden surrounded the house which was set on a large piece of property that extended down Plymbridge Crescent. Mrs. Rudolf was responsible for naming the street Brookfield Road. From 1938 to 1963 the Rudolf's son Robert Gray Rudolf and his family lived in the house.

10 **15 PLYMBRIDGE ROAD**

Of all the houses this one perhaps best exemplifies the country feeling of the valley. Built in 1935, it was designed by Mr. & Mrs. Nelles Starr with the help of James McDonald

Lindeman, Mrs. Starr's uncle, who was an American architect. It was angled to get full benefit from the sun and was constructed of old softly shaded yellow brick. Its farmhouse design only deviates from tradition by having much larger windows at Mrs. Starrs insistence.

Calto & Calto, architects and builders, already friends of the Starrs drew up the final plans and built the house. So taken with the hollow, Mr. Calto went on to build himself a house across the street, number fourteen Plymbridge.

1 **51 PLYMBRIDGE ROAD**

Well set back down a laneway sits a wonderful early example of Bauhaus architecture. It was built in the late forties by sculptors Emanuel Hahn and Elizabeth Wyn Wood. She helped design the house which takes its inspiration from a house Gropius built in California. (He was the founder of the famous Bauhaus School of Design in Germany.)

Emanuel Hahn was a German immigrant who had a great interest in design. He became the dean of Canadian sculptors and is most famous for the following Canadian coin designs: the silver dollar depicting a Voyageur and an Indian travelling together in a canoe, the sleek "Bluenose" on the 10-cent piece and the majestic Caribou head on the quarter. Elizabeth Wyn Wood was once one of his most promising students. Together they lived a productive life revolving around sculpting, teaching and socializing with their many artist friends. Hahn did a marble bust of his wife which can be seen at the Art Gallery of Ontario.

After her husband died in 1957 Elizabeth Wyn Wood added a twenty foot high studio to the house and worked there until 1966 when she passed away.

In the park at the corner of Mill Street and Donino Avenue is a Centennial commemorative sculpture – a casting of one of her works. This is apt because both Hahn and

Wyn Wood loved living in hollow. They felt it a privilege to be surrounded by such natural beauty and history.

12

HILLCREST SCHOOL (Originally Donwoods House)

59 PLYMBRIDGE ROAD

This elegant three story residence has had a long and varied history. In 1909, Will Mulock Boulton, a mining lawyer and his wife, Margaret Amy Boulton bought 135 acres of land in the valley and began to build this large house. Unfortunately, Mr. Boulton died in 1912, before the house was completed. In 1913 when the family moved in, Mrs. Boulton found herself responsible for the upkeep of a substantial country residence that needed a large staff to maintain. A cook and butler, maids and coachman were employed by the family. They kept driving and riding horses in the stables a short distance from the house. (Their stables have since been converted into a private residence on Plymbridge Crescent).

Beautiful rugs and painting adorned the house. There were vegetable gardens to the north and flower gardens on the river side of the house. The family played tennis on a court on the lawn. It was a house built for a gracious era. In 1921, Mrs. Boulton began to sell off parts of the property to give herself a source of income. During World War 1 she turned her home into a guest house and operated a tea room. Later she moved next door to number 55 Plymbridge Road. Donwoods House then became the Waycroft School for boys and girls, operated by Miss Targett and Miss Wallbank, known for their strict discipline. Hillcrest Progressive School, a nursery has been located on the site since 1955. In 1980 a major renovation designed by Stephen Langmead was completed.

13

83 PLYMBRIDGE ROAD

In 1925 the Boulton's daughter, Elizabeth Marion Robinson and her husband John R. Robinson had this beautiful residence

constructed from a hundred year old Lake Simcoe barn. The logs were transported piece by piece to Toronto where they were assembled on the property. The house is a duplicate of the one that the Robinson family owned in Beaverton Ontario. The cost was \$17,000, an astounding figure in those days. To sustain the sense of history inside the house, the Robinsons obtained materials from several old Toronto residences, including some from one of the celebrated Cawthra houses. The panelling, door knobs, staircase and bannister are all items from other places that were installed in the house. John Robinson's aim was to create something that was truly unique.

As their family expanded, the Robinsons found that the house became too small for them. They moved a log cabin onto the property as a place for their 6 sons to bunk. Their mother woke them for breakfast with a ship's bell that she pulled from her bedroom. In 1954, the second log cabin was moved to the family farm. Situated beside its more contemporary neighbours, this substantial log residence, recalls our pioneer origins.

4 **16 MAY TREE ROAD**

Architect Elmar Tampold built this impressive modern concept house for his family in 1984. It is sited to accommodate the forested hillside behind it and faces south to take advantage of the sunlight. Up to date methods of concrete construction were used in the building of this unusual four story residence. Many skylights allow natural sunlight to filter through the house which is set back on a wooded, very private property.

5 **36 GREEN VALLEY ROAD**

This unique house has the distinctive touch of architect Peter Dickinson who also designed Inn on the Park. He makes wonderful use of local Ontario stone on both sites. This house is intriguing, in that it combines a feeling of openness with complete privacy.

16

NUMBER 8 & 10 PLYMBRIDGE ROAD

Both these houses were designed in 1984 by Keith Wagland, the Toronto architect who also designed the George Gardiner Ceramics Museum on University Avenue. Number 8 has an English country look while number 10 conveys a West coast and Japanese influence. Although different in design, the common use of wood and stucco allows them to compliment each other. The garages are located at the back of the properties, which is unusual in newly built residences.

17

18

6 PLYMBRIDGE ROAD

"Ceedarheem" was built for Sir John and Lady van Hoogenhouck Tulleken in 1924. The name is Dutch for "Home of the Cedars". They were of Dutch nobility and the house was architecturally designed in the Dutch colonial style. A stained glass window in the top half of the front double door was brought from The Hague and is dated 1562. The present owner Mrs. R.J. van H. Tulleken is the daughter-in-law of the original owners. She maintains a wonderfully imaginative garden which surrounds this charming and distinctive house.

19

3 PLYMBRIDGE ROAD

This spectacular cedar chalet has caused many passerbys to pause and have a look. Snuggled against the hill and surrounded by large pines its setting is reminiscent of rural Bavaria. Inside it has a multitude of levels and half levels with many skylights that look up through the trees. It was designed by architect Lawrence Brodeur and built in 1975. The present owners have added several rooms without changing the original character of the house.

20

MILL STONE – Junction of Plymbridge and Donwoods Drive

In pioneer days the little village of York Mills hummed with the sound of numerous mills that were used to grind grain and saw timber for

local farmers. The west branch of the Don River that ran through the hollow supplied the power for these mills. This mill stone was used in George Pratt's grist mill at the corner of Brookfield and Donino. The mill operated between 1886 and 1926. "Meet me at the Mill Stone" is a familiar phrase heard in the valley. Teenagers gather at this spot to chat. School children wait there to catch their bus. And at Christmas time residents congregate at this historic site to sing carols.

made of buhrstone. A delightful pair of wooden racoons stand guard in a tree overhead. They were done by the late Bruce Miller, a professional carver for the Provincial Government.

1) **74 DONWOODS DRIVE**

A Miss Fanny Lindsay had this English country style house built for her in 1924. She was close friends with Lady van Hoogenhouck Tulleken of Plymbridge Road. She gave lovely teas and spoke several languages. She maintained a staff to keep her house and beautiful gardens in perfect condition. Eventually she sold the house and moved to the Canary Islands. For a long time the Creed's of the retail store Creeds on Bloor St. owned the house.

2) **24 IVOR ROAD**

Built in 1922, this English style house comes alive in the spring when the scilla bloom. A carpet of blue matches the stucco of the house, making one of the most charming and perfect sights in the valley. Note the fine leaded pane casement windows.

3) **23 DONWOODS DRIVE**

If you're strolling down the Donwoods hill, it's worthwhile detouring along the lane that runs behind numbers 11, 17, 19, 21 and 23. At the end of the laneway is a log coach house and next to it stands a log and stone residence set on a beautiful site overlooking the valley. The log section of the house was originally a 19th century log cabin. It and the coach house were brought here from Lake Simcoe. The stone section of the house is a later addition. Beside the coach house is a large mill stone