

# A Year in Old Markham Village

*Four Seasons of Observations, Experiences and Local Lore*



George W. J. Duncan

2022

## **Prelude – The Art of Observation**

It takes a special kind of discipline to be a good observer. There are certain people who have that discipline, and thanks to them, we have a legacy of stories of vanished times and places. The late Thoreau MacDonald (1901-1989), designer, illustrator, calligrapher and journal-keeper, was one of those remarkable people. I'm certain that he was inspired by his namesake, the American writer Henry David Thoreau, the author of *Walden*.

I first became acquainted with the artwork and book designs of Thoreau MacDonald in the mid-1980s while working as the Architectural Historian for the North York Historical Board. Thoreau was the son of the noted Group of Seven artist, J.E.H. MacDonald, and his wife, Joan Lavis. I began a modest collection of copies of Mr. MacDonald's books and distinctive black-and-white sketches and thus became part of a dedicated group of people who have a special appreciation for this remarkable artist and his work.

One particularly memorable publication I came across was a collection of writings by Thoreau MacDonald simply titled, *Notebooks*. This book, published by Penumbra Press in 1980, contains Thoreau's writings from different time periods. For me, the most compelling of these are found in Chapter II, Notes from Around Home, 1931-1976. The notes are mostly brief jottings concerning observation of weather, people, places, and events. These observations reflected the writer's interests and attitudes, and were evocative of life in the village of Thornhill as it gradually transformed from a rural village into a suburb of the ever-expanding city of Toronto.

Inspired by Thoreau MacDonald's *Notebooks*, early in 2021 it occurred to me that it would be an interesting endeavor to become an observer of my own community, Markham Village, and its environs, using my own, personal approach. I decided to structure my observations around one year of four seasons, beginning on the first day of spring 2021, and ending with the first day of spring in 2022. However, this was no ordinary year. The COVID-19 Pandemic, which began in 2020, was still with us. I referred to this significant impact on our lives in my observations, but I didn't let it overshadow what I was doing. Rather, the things I have written about reflect my special interest in local history and old buildings, but also include observations about the weather, village life and other miscellany, as an homage to MacDonald and his talent for finding value and interest in the ordinary.

## **Markham Village on the Eve of Confederation**

Before embarking on this journey through Markham Village of the present, it seems appropriate to look back on what the village was like in the early nineteenth century, when it was an important centre of manufacturing and employment. This is the time when someone quipped that Markham Village was “the Birmingham of Ontario,” perhaps a boastful over-statement by a local booster at the time, but a statement that has endured in the collective memory of the community nonetheless. *Mitchell & Co.’s General Directory for the City of Toronto and Gazetteer of the Counties of York and Peel for the Year 1866* provides a succinct summary of the essential characteristics of Markham Village at a time when the new nation of the Dominion of Canada was taking shape:

**“Markham** – A post village in the township of Markham, county of York, situated on the River Rouge 20 miles from Toronto, was first settled about the year 1800, by German settlers. In May 1826, Sinclair Holden, Esq., built the first house. Mr. Joseph Reesor laid out the village. The post office was established about the year 1828, James Johnston, being appointed first post-master. The village enjoys good water privileges, there are several manufacturers here, especially engaged in the production of agricultural implements. Messrs. Speight & Son, have a large foundry and machine shop, in which they manufacture farm waggons and agricultural implements; the celebrity of which are generally acknowledged in the counties of York, Peel and Ontario. Mr. H. R. Wales is also engaged, likewise Mr. James Pringle, extensively in the manufacture of carriages and buggies. There is a woolen and flour mill in the village, under the proprietorship of T. A. Milne, containing three run of stones, and one of the finest tanneries in the county, is conducted by Mr. James Robinson. The village contains five churches viz.: Church of England, Presbyterian, Wesleyan Methodist, Congregationalist and Roman Catholic. A Division Court is held here every two months, Judge Boyd, presiding; and the several societies, consists of a Masonic Lodge No. 87, meeting on Friday, on or before full moon, an Orange Lodge No. 548, and a Temperance Organization. There is one Grammar and three Common Schools, all well attended. Mail daily. Population 900.”<sup>1</sup>

## **This Old House**

A good starting point for documenting a year in old Markham Village is my own home at 4 Peter Street. The Duncan family purchased this heritage property in 2015, and moved into the Mount Joy neighbourhood of the Markham Village Heritage Conservation District from the new urbanist community of Cornell.

A plaque on the front of house reads: Abram Sider, Carpenter, c.1895. Thanks to the work of the Markham Village Conservancy, and in particular the enthusiasm for local history of Donna Knight, a neighbour and Conservancy member, many of the fine old houses on Peter Street have historical plaques like ours. The plaque programme has, in recent years, expanded to other parts of the heritage district and contributes to a sense of place that urban planners like to talk about.





It was in 1884 that Jonas Ramer, seeing an opportunity to develop the front of the family farm into village lots, created Plan 594. He was the son of Peter Ramer, a member of a prominent Pennsylvania-German Mennonite family that came to Markham Township in 1809. The Mount Joy neighbourhood of old Markham Village was named after the Ramer family's former home in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Jonas Ramer was willed the east half of Lot 14, Concession 7 by his father in 1879. He lived in the farmhouse that still stands on Springdale Avenue, which was built in 1858.<sup>2</sup>

Following the success of the first subdivision of village lots fronting on Main Street, in the year 1891 Jonas Ramer next created Plan 1105, which laid out a 38-lot subdivision on either side of a new street named Peter Street, in honour of his father. House-building commenced in 1891 with the John and Elizabeth Fuller residence at 23 Peter Street. Many more homes were constructed, some of brick, some of wood, during the 1890s. The result was a complete street of Late Victorian residential architecture which has remained quite intact to the present day, with only a few more recent dwellings built among the older ones.

In 1895, Abram Sider, a carpenter 16 years of age, purchased Lot 55, Plan 1105 from Jonas Ramer. The price was a very modest \$80. Abram Sider, born in 1879, was the son of Isaac and Susannah (Lehman) Sider of Mount Joy. His family was part of the Pennsylvania-German Mennonite community. His mother was widowed at a young age. At the time of the 1891 census, Susannah Sider and her 12-year-old son Abram lived on part of the property that would later become the site of the Markham Museum.

Abram Sider was likely a carpenter's apprentice when he purchased his Peter Street building lot. He probably apprenticed with one of the carpenter-builders active in the neighbourhood in the 1890s. The house at 4 Peter Street is dated c.1895, but appears to have been completed closer to 1898 when the assessed value of the property increased. Similarities in design details to other Markham houses built by Jesse Hoover Raymer suggest that he was the master builder of the Sider residence. This suggests that Abram Sider may have apprenticed with Raymer, and they worked on the new house together. The Queen Anne Revival style house was unique on Peter Street and in Markham Village for its prominent corner tower.

Abram Sider married Edith Mary Challice of Toronto on July 20, 1898. Although Abram had been raised in the Mennonite faith, he had become a member of the Methodist Church by the time he married. The Siders had four children: Ross, Harold, Murray and Grace. By the early 1900s, the building boom in the village had slowed down, and with less work available for a young carpenter, in 1909 the family decided to move to west Toronto, where suburban growth was going strong.

The former Sider house was sold to a succession of owners, one of whom decided to simplify the ornate Late Victorian residence by removing most of the decorative wooden details and the top of the tower. The house was further modernized with a series of maintenance-free claddings that were fashionable at the time of their installation, including red insul-brick, grey insul-brick and lastly, white aluminium siding.

In 2016-2017, the Duncan family restored the exterior of 4 Peter Street using archival photographs as a guide. Scott Rushlow was the designer, and Dave Wylie Restorations was the builder. The restoration was completed with a period paint colour scheme that echoed the pattern as it appeared on the old photographs. This is our home in old Markham Village.

## **SPRING 2021**

**March 20, 2021 – The Vernal Equinox.** The first day of spring began with brilliant sunshine and a clear sky, but with a temperature around the freezing mark. This began a series of afternoons that warmed up to double-digit temperatures that lasted six days. Whereas yesterday there was a noticeable absence of bird activity, when I was just out

of the house, I saw two robins on a neighbour's front lawn, hopping about, looking for something in the short grass (first robins seen March 17). I walked to Springdale Park and Valley, with my destination being the Forest Therapy Trail. On the way, I heard the calls of robins and cardinals around the subdivision streets leading to the park. The rhythmic hammering of a woodpecker could be heard deep in the heart of the recovering pine forest woodlot. Where it passes through two rows of white pines, a part of the trail follows a straight path, rather than a meandering one. In the mid-morning light, the straight path, carpeted with dry, brown pine needles, appeared like the shadowy aisle of an old Gothic cathedral. Homeward-bound through Cedar Valley, I noted the distinctive call of a redwing blackbird coming from the wetland area to the south of the trail.

**March 21** – A neighbour told me about a large woodlot that she visits, located in the Raymerville community to the west of here, off a street called Cairns. She spoke about the abundance of trilliums to be seen there in the spring (late April, early May), and how she likes to search for the uncommon, magenta-coloured trillium flowers. This morning, I visited the Raymerville Woods, which is dense with deciduous trees, but none of them are very large or very old. There is a lot of underbrush and fallen timber on the forest floor. Saw a large boulder with different bands of colour that reminded me of a larger, similar boulder the family calls "Danish rock," due to its resemblance to a pastry of that name. I heard a woodpecker hammering away at a distant tree, making a hollow sound that made me think he was looking for insects in deadwood. As I followed the trail in a westward direction, the path became less defined and passed through a grove of old white cedar trees, some with raised roots that resemble the writhing tentacles of a squid or a sea monster out of a movie about the mysterious deep.

**March 22** – Another sunny day, cool at first but warming up as the day progressed. My destination today was another visit to Springdale Park and Valley and the Forest Therapy Trail. An interpretive plaque describes how the trail is based on the Japanese practice of *Shinrin Yoku*, translated as "forest bathing." This afternoon I took the time to pause my walk and sit by the meandering, narrow stream that originates from a natural spring and flows into Robinson Creek. The quick, cheerful trickling sound of the water next to me contrasted with the sound of distant traffic, which I have not noticed before while busy with walking. It seems like stones and boulders have been deliberately placed in the stream bed to help keep the water moving on its way. The spring issues from a nearly horizontal pipe in a low bank behind the houses on Beck Drive. It looks clear and clean, but there is staining from minerals on the stones near the source. Iron? Sometimes, you can detect a faint smell of sulphur. This was the source of water supply for Mount Joy and Markham Village until the Town hooked up to Toronto water in the mid-1970s.<sup>3</sup> There's little trace of the waterworks or any of its infrastructure to be seen today, only a rusty pipe sticking out of the ground, encased in a wire cage, and the spring itself, now issuing from a modern-looking pipe. The spring was also known for its health benefits when a spa operated on the Jonas Ramer farm beginning in the 1880s. It was claimed that bathing in these waters would give a person long life and could

treat a host of ailments. The spring water was pumped from its source over to the Ramer farmhouse, where guests would stay during their rejuvenation. In his book, *Fun Was Where We Made It – Mount Joy – Markham 1905-1915*, Fred Dixon described how the spring was covered by a springhouse, and nearby was Jonas Ramer's sawmill and pond.<sup>4</sup> The old house built by Jonas Ramer in 1858 still stands at 30-34 Springdale Avenue. A bronze plaque mounted on a boulder next to the spring tells the story.

**March 23** – An even warmer day than the previous three. The sun was out in a sky filled with thin, hazy clouds. On the south side of the house, where there is good sun exposure for much of the day, daylilies, iris, tulips, and crocuses were beginning to sprout from the earth. As usual, the squirrels have been disturbing some of the buried bulbs. Hope they didn't get too many. This morning I drove to the trail head in the Rouge National Urban Park, at the north-west corner of Reesor Road and Elgin Mills Road. I met an older couple at the trail gate and said, "Hardly need your coat today," to which the woman replied, "That's what I said," directed at her husband (they were both wearing winter coats). Heard the call of redwing blackbirds from the wetland area a little north of Elgin Mills Road. Further along the trail, I saw some remnants of very old cedar rail snake fences that follow the boundaries of some of the farm fields. The rail fences are interwoven into trees and entangled in brush that has grown up around them. Some sections are almost completely tumbled down and sure to disappear, transient remnants of the nineteenth century agricultural landscape. One section, running along the north boundary of a woodlot, is quite intact. It's eight rails high where complete. Looking at this farm fence, probably dating from the 1860s, makes me think of the illustrations of farms depicted in the county atlases of the 1870s-1880s.

Later: At the north-east corner of Main Street North and Highway 7, Markham Village. There has been a service station at this corner since the 1920s. This was the site of Markham's most famous crime, the Stonehouse robbery of February, 1936, which involved some genuine, old-time gangsters.<sup>5</sup> This is a noteworthy incident from the community's past, but that was not what interested me today. I'm looking much farther back in time, back to the 1820s just as Reesorville, later to be known as Markham Village, was just beginning to take shape. In a brief description of Markham Village, Mitchell & Co.'s directory of 1866 states "In May, 1826, Sinclair Holden, Esq., built the first house."<sup>6</sup> Sinclair Holden came from Belfast, Ireland in the early 1820s, and settled in Reesorville, where he was a school-teacher for a short time, before becoming a merchant.<sup>7</sup> What brought him to this exact location is unknown. He married Abigail Lundy in 1825. Of historical interest is the fact that the famous battle of Lundy's Lane, which took place during the War of 1812, was fought on her father's farm at Stamford, now Niagara Falls. In looking at land records, I found it interesting that Sinclair Holden did not formally purchase the property where he built his house from Joseph Reesor until 1832. Holden established a store on this corner, possibly the first in the village, that stood until the early twentieth century. A photograph of the last days of the Holden store, clipped from a newspaper around the time it was torn down in 1923, is found in the archives of the Markham Museum. The Holden residence, modified over the years,

stood for a while longer, at least until the mid-1950s. Sinclair Holden was a merchant, druggist, Justice of the Peace and notary public. He also was a lay-preacher in the Methodist Church. Sinclair Holden's daughter Annie carried on the family business at least into the 1890s.

Returning home via Robinson Street, I saw a gentleman practicing his golf swing on the side lawn of Craig Cottage, the stucco bungalow next to the creek.

**March 24 & 25** - Light rain overnight left the ground a little wet. This morning, I met Fred Robbins, the Stouffville historian, at the Rouge Park trail head at Mongolia. I wanted to show him the remnants of the snake rail fence I found along the trail, since it is such a good example of its kind. He brought an air photo that showed the trail as it relates to the fields and woodlots in this concession block. From that, we learned that the old rail fence was on the east half of Lot 26, Concession 9. Consulting the map of Markham Township in the *Historical Atlas of York County, 1878*, I later learned that this was once the farm of Christian Barkey Jr. Many birds were active as we followed the trail. We saw robins, a nuthatch and redwing blackbirds, all at close range. The next day I returned to photograph fossils seen on the large limestone blocks that form a seating area in the first woodlot on the trail that runs between Elgin Mills Road and Nineteenth Avenue. These blocks were quarried in Simcoe County, where the approximately 450 million years old Upper Ordovician Gull River Formation is exposed. The top surfaces of the blocks preserve the diverse fauna of a seabed at a time when this part of North America was in a tropical latitude. The most numerous fossils on the blocks are coiled gastropods (snails), brachiopods (lamp shells), pelecypods (clamshells), tapered, ribbed nautiloids (related to today chambered nautilus) and fragments of trilobites. The mollusc shells show up best against the background of greyish-white limestone with dark green colouring due to the presence of the mineral, glauconite. After "collecting" the fossils with my camera, I made my way back to the trail head and noted the yellow, dandelion-like flowers of coltsfoot, an early bloomer which I later learned is not a native species but one likely brought here by the early settlers for use in traditional medicine. In old English, this plant is known as "coughwort." As I walked through the concession block admiring the agricultural fields, wetlands and tree lines, I was reminded of Henry David Thoreau's observation in *Walden* that a person can enjoy a landscape without bearing the burden of owning it.

**March 27** - Lorne Smith, the official historian for the City of Markham, was kind enough to give me his extra copy of the book, *A String of Amber, The Story of the Mennonites in Canada*, by Blodwen Davies (1897-1966). This book, based on the author's research into Mennonite history, culture and folklore undertaken while she was living in Cedar Grove, was published posthumously in 1973. Ms. Davies, born in Longueuil, Quebec, moved to Toronto in the early 1920s to become part of the city's arts and letters circle that included members of the Group of Seven.<sup>8</sup> She was a journalist, historian, travel writer and folklorist. She moved to Markham in 1946 and became interested in the culture of her Mennonite neighbours in the rural community of Cedar Grove. Many



of the early colonial settlers in Markham Village, Mount Joy and vicinity were Pennsylvania-German Mennonites that came to this area of Upper Canada in the first decade of the nineteenth century, in search of fertile land and religious freedom. I found *A String of Amber* to be a remarkable account of Blodwen Davies' personal experiences with the descendants of those early settler families, who shared their stories with her at a time when Markham was still primarily an agricultural community that retained much of its nineteenth century character.

Spectacular blooms in the south side garden of our property today, blue, yellow and white – a type of crocus that looks something like an iris.

**March 29** – Seeing the coltsfoot flowers a couple of days ago, and looking for information about them after my walk reminded me of Josephus Reesor (1820-1916), a farmer and healer who lived south of Box Grove on Lot 3, Concession 9, in a large fieldstone farmhouse that still stands at 15 Bewell Drive. Josephus Reesor was a son of Peter Reesor and Esther Eby Reesor, early Pennsylvania-German Mennonite settlers in eastern Markham Township. In the 1861 census, Josephus Reesor gave his profession as “doctor.” He was not formally qualified as a medical doctor but he was locally known as a skilled herbalist. Some of his treatments, said to be traditional remedies sourced from indigenous peoples, were passed down through generations of the Reesor family after his death. He was first married to Susannah Baker and later to Elizabeth Pike Hoover. When Josephus and Elizabeth Reesor retired from the farm, they moved to a brick house at the south-east corner of Ninth Line and Fourteenth Avenue in the centre of Box Grove. Blodwen Davies mentions both coltsfoot and Josephus Reesor in her book, *A String of Amber*.<sup>9</sup>

**March 30** – I decided on an early walk today, just after breakfast. A cool start to a sunny, warm day that was forecast to be the best of the week. Noted many robins around the house. Last year a pair nested in the angle of one of our downspouts. As I passed the seniors residence that backs onto Bullock Drive, two Canada geese were having a loud conversation on the parapet of the building. Made my way to the north entrance to Tannery Pond and followed the trail to the elevated boardwalk. There was a strong flow of water in Robinson Creek this morning, probably owing from the heavy rain we experienced on the Friday and Saturday before. Until I read the interpretive plaques along the way, I didn't know that the wetland area of Tannery Pond is actually an engineered wetland, with a series of interconnected stormwater ponds designed to clean up the storm runoff from the streets of the village. It's rare to have an urban wetland environment like this. This morning there were many bird-calls of redwing blackbirds and cardinals. I spotted a bright red male cardinal in a tall tree on the boundary of the pond. Its colour was intensified by the morning sun. On my way back to Bullock Drive, a fellow walker warned me about the “dive-bombing” birds that would trouble people walking through the area once the redwing blackbirds have nested.

The area to the south of the pond was a busy industrial centre from the 1830s to the early twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> Robinson Creek, a tributary of the Rouge River, was dammed by William Robinson in 1835 as a source of water for a tannery he established south of the bridge, on the west side of the watercourse. A tannery is an industrial operation that cures animal hides for leather. The business lasted until about 1900. Closer to the dam was a foundry where bells were manufactured in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, first by Isaac Mather, then by Stephen Peer. After the days of the foundry, there was a shoe factory and then a bakery here. An unopened street named Peer Street bordered the east side of the pond, which was historically known as Robinson's Pond, and later Tannery and Foundry Pond, according to a map of 1878. A large, brick woolen mill was built opposite the tannery in 1886. Maple Leaf Woollen Mills was a big operation that ended abruptly when a lightning strike started a fire in 1917, just as the mill had received a contract to make blankets for the Canadian Army during the First World War. The Craig Cottage at 119 Robinson Street was built in 1934 upon remnants of the mill's foundations. Hurricane Hazel washed out the last version of the dam in 1954. Part of the old poured concrete and stone rubble structure of the dam can still be seen on the north side of the creek. I took the opportunity to photograph the ruins before the surrounding trees and shrubs came into leaf.

**March 31** – The other day, I met George Morrison, a retired Markham firefighter who lives in the older, white frame house on the south side of Highway 7, east of Cosburn Road and the Cosburn Plaza. For as long as I can remember, there has been a jumbo-sized, waving Santa on his home's west side wall during the Christmas season, something my children have commented on many times. Mr. Morrison has lived in Markham Village for 60 years, but his family comes from Thornhill. His late cousin, Mary Eckardt Elson, was related to the Eckardt family of Unionville, and grew up in Uxbridge Township. Her father, William "Bill" Eckardt had a mechanic's shop and sawmill at Eckardt Corners, which is at the north-east corner of the town lines between Whitchurch-Stouffville, Uxbridge and Pickering. Mary Elson (1933-2008) was a dedicated family historian who researched and assembled a vast quantity of genealogical information on Philip Eckardt, a prominent member of the Berczy settler group, and his many descendants. From this material, I learned that John and Mary Eckardt owned 2 Peter Street, the property next door to me, from 1903 to 1909. John Eckardt (1843-1922), a retired farmer, was a son of George and Isabella (Robinson) Eckardt, and a grandson of Philip Eckardt. Mary (Snowball) Eckardt (1847-1940) was related to the well-known Markham brick-making family of that name. Mr. Morrison passed along his cousin's boxes of research to find an appropriate home for them. One of the boxes contained a two-volume set of *A History of Toronto and the County of York*, 1885. Volume II contains biographical sketches of a number of residents of the county who paid a subscription fee to be included. There is a section on Markham Village that includes the following past citizens of Markham Village:<sup>11</sup>

John Anthony  
Samuel Charles Ash  
Ebenezer Burk

F. G. Percy  
Frederick A. Reesor  
Henry B. Reesor

George James Chauncey  
William Cherry  
A. Fleury  
George Graham  
William Hamilton Hall  
John Jerman  
H. C. Marr  
William Marr  
Thomas Morgan  
George Pringle  
Robert Pringle

James Robinson  
Dr. Wesley Robinson  
Henry Robinson  
James Speight  
G. R. Vanzant  
Joseph Wales  
Van B. Woodruff  
Washington G. Woodruff  
T. F. Wooten

**April 1** – A return to colder temperatures for the next few days after a warm spell that ended yesterday. The sky was clear until mid-morning when cloud-cover suggested possible snow flurries, but when they came around lunch-time they were minimal. A strong, gusty wind from the north-west in the afternoon and evening. Today, we were around the freezing mark. I can't think of a better way to honour the old tradition of playing pranks on this particular day than to point out a house in my neighbourhood that would fool most people about its age. With its aluminum siding, modern doors and windows, and a simple form reminiscent of the 1940s, the two-storey house at 336 Main Street North doesn't look like a nineteenth century building, but it is. In fact, this modest house is one of the oldest in the Mount Joy neighbourhood. In the archives of the Markham Museum there is a black and white photograph that shows the David Meyer House at 332 Main Street North, and this house next door to the north. In the old photograph, 336 Main Street North has clapboard siding, wood windows, chimneys at both gable ends, and a hip-roofed front verandah. There's a kitchen wing at the back, with a wooden pump just off the side porch. This house shares some design characteristics with the A. B. Ramer House, 1848, at 304 Main Street. This part of Mount Joy was once the farm of Jacob Wismer, a member of a Pennsylvania-German Mennonite family. His large, Mennonite Georgian farmhouse still stands at 56 Timbermill Crescent (formerly addressed 5815 Sixteenth Avenue). By the mid-1800s, there were several other houses on the Wismer property, fronting on Main Street. In 1850, Wismer sold a quarter-acre lot to David McKenzie, a house-painter. The first phase of the house at 336 Main Street North might have been a one-storey, plank-on-plank dwelling noted in the 1851 census, which may have already been standing on the property when it was sold to McKenzie. When David McKenzie and his wife Eliza sold the property in 1855, the increase in price suggests that an improvement had taken place, possibly the addition of a second storey. Were it not for the archival photograph, this house from the early days of Mount Joy would not have been recognized for what it truly is.

In the morning, I saw female and male cardinals at the bird feeder, and male and female downy woodpeckers at the suet feeder.

**April 2, 3, & 4 – Easter Weekend** – On Good Friday, we noticed that a number of our neighbours had already put their outdoor furniture out on their verandahs in anticipation of warmer days to come. Peter Street, with so many older houses, is a street of front verandahs. Front porches and verandahs are once again becoming architectural features designed to encourage a revival of the custom of front porch sitting, with all of its social benefits. This revival started with the New Urbanism approach to community design that first made its effects known in Markham in the mid-1990s. My wife Linda and I sometimes talk about how nice it would be to enjoy our morning coffee on the front porch, which gets the benefit of the morning sun. This is a pleasing idea that is not often acted upon due to the reality that one must first get dressed to go outside, and that usually happens only *after* morning coffee. Our front porch is tucked into the south-east corner of our house, and has room for a loveseat or two chairs. It's close enough to the street to allow us to greet passing neighbours, and has good views of the front and side gardens. The porch is trimmed with all manner of Late Victorian wooden ornament and is a delight to eye, but one that will eventually become vexing to re-paint in its two-toned colour scheme. We painted the tongue and groove ceiling sky blue to follow an old tradition that I learned about in Jeanne Minnhinnick's *At Home in Upper Canada*. Painting the ceiling to look like the sky, which gives a light, cooling effect on hot days, apparently goes back to the Renaissance, or earlier.<sup>12</sup>

It was cool and breezy on Saturday, with the potential for rain later in the day, nevertheless it was time to bring out our porch and patio seating from the garage. On Easter Sunday, early in the morning I heard the distinctive call of a cardinal, and from that point, I was awake. Today, sunny and clear, with the temperature beginning to warm up nicely, the best day of the holiday weekend. I saw some black butterflies with a yellow border on their wings. Not sure what they are, so I will have to look them up.

**April 5** – Fred Robbins knew that I was looking into Sinclair Holden, the builder of the first house and an early store in Markham Village. In a search of past editions of the *Stouffville Tribune*, Fred found the following piece of interesting information:

“David Burkholder, grandson of the immigrant ancestor Ulrich who landed in Philadelphia in 1722 was a native of Franklin County, Penn. He left Chambersburg Penn. on horseback in 1822. When he rode into what is now Markham Village the late Sinclair Holden was excavating for his store which stood for many years at the corner of Main Street and Wellington Streets.”<sup>13</sup>

A mild week is in the forecast, with sun and clouds but not much in the way of rain for April showers. Buds on the lilacs have gotten larger over the past few days, and daylilies, iris, tulips, crocuses and daffodils have come further out of the ground with the sun and warmth. A grey squirrel has lately discovered our suet bird feeder and has performed some amusing acrobatics to get at the suet cakes. Generally, bird activity has increased, and yesterday evening, near sunset, there was a veritable symphony of bird calls around the wetland in neighbouring Cedar Valley.

**April 6** – Ross Bartlett is a neighbour that lives in the north section of Peter Street, the area we refer to as the “mansion district” because it is outside of the heritage district and people can build whatever sort of house they like there. Generally, they are big ones, with stone fronts, high ceilings and many rooms. Ross lives in a modest frame bungalow that is, like the other post-war houses on the street, destined one day to be redeveloped. When he was a boy, he lived on a 50-acre farm on the west side of McCowan Road, about where Highway 407 passes through. Born in 1926, Ross is 95 years old and has a wealth of reminiscences of old Markham Township. When I was looking into the history of the Eckardt family, he told me about Abraham “Abe” Eckardt (1865-1936), who was the grandson of Abraham Eckardt and the great-grandson of Philip Eckardt and Ann Elizabeth Koepke, Berczy settlers. He was an elderly man when Ross knew him in the 1930s. Abe and his wife, Mary Jane Walker Eckardt, had a 50-acre farm on Lot 7, Concession 7, across the road from the Bartlett family’s farm. Ross related to me that one day when he was talking with Mr. Eckardt about fishing in the Rouge River, he told him how the Eckardt family shipped their grain (wheat) down the river on flat-bottomed barges. Mr. Eckardt said the river was much broader in those days.

Daffodils began to bloom today. A heavy rain fell for about 20 minutes just after 10:00 in the evening, then tapered off. Good to get some rain on the lawn and garden, but it wasn’t a lot. In the afternoon, my wife and I received our first vaccination against COVID-19, to our great relief.

**April 7** – Spent the day recovering from my COVID-19 vaccination.

**April 8** – Today began a run of warmer-than-average days. No rain today. Seems dry for April. I saw a patch of dandelions in bloom this morning, in a green area on the north side of Highway 7, just west of a small ravine. I’m looking for traces of the founder of Markham Village. Through the years, Markham Village has been known by three different names. Joseph Reesor, its founder, is said to have wanted to call the community Mannhiem, but it didn’t stick.<sup>14</sup> In the early years, the village on the Rouge was called Reesorville after the founding family, and according to Mitchell & Co.’s Directory of 1866, Joseph Reesor laid out the village.<sup>15</sup> He started to sell village lots at the west end of his property beginning in the early 1830s. I have not been able to find out how long the name Reesorville was in use. I believe the community’s name was changed to Markham Village when the first post office was opened in 1829.

Joseph Reesor (1776-1861) was a native of Dauphin County, Pennsylvania. The exact connection between Joseph Reesor and the Reesors of Cedar Grove has yet to be worked out, notwithstanding the impressive volume of Reesor genealogy that chronicles the history of this prominent Pennsylvania-German family in North America. Some of the Markham Village Reesors became followers of the Methodist Church for a time, whereas the Cedar Grove Reesors were Mennonite. The land where Joseph Reesor settled, Lot 11, Concession 8, Markham Township, was owned by Henry Lichte from 1808 to 1814. Today, this is the area on the north side of Highway 7 between Main Street



North and Ninth Line. Henry Lichte and his wife Maria, were Pennsylvania-Germans that came here about the year 1803. Joseph Reesor married their daughter, Anna, and bought the property from his father-in-law in 1814. According to *Markham 1793-1900*, the Reesors initially lived in a log cabin on the east side of the creek that crossed their lot.<sup>16</sup> The creek is now called Mount Joy Creek, but used to be called Exhibition Creek because it ran through the old fairgrounds. A private road, Savannah Crescent, leads to a large, modern-era house that stands on a rise of land overlooking the ravine. That is where the log cabin is said to have stood. By 1851, Joseph and Anna's son Joseph Reesor Jr. (1819-1892) was living with a family of his own in a frame house on the same property. Later, the senior Reesors moved from their log cabin and built a two-storey brick house further east on the farm, nearly opposite the Armstrong family's stone farmhouse. This house must have been standing until at least 1979, the year the book *Markham 1793-1900* was published, because it is described as the Douglas Isaac residence at that time. I'm still hoping that someone has a photograph of this important old house since it survived until relatively recent times, but so far, no luck. A subdivision was built on the site in the 1980s. With the disappearance of the old farmhouse, little remains to commemorate this significant chapter in the history of Markham Village. Joseph Street on the east side of Markham Village was named for Joseph Reesor Sr. A brick house at 10 Washington Street was lived in by Joseph Reesor Jr.'s widow, Hannah (Shank) Reesor (1833-1916), in the early 1900s. It currently houses offices for the Lynde Centre for Dermatology.

Moving east from Savannah Crescent, I stopped in at the Elmwood Cemetery next door and noted a gathering of very old grave markers near the gate. The gravestones have been grouped together, lying flat on the ground where they are deteriorating with time. One grave marker in particular stands out, and I felt compelled to copy down the inscription:

"In Memory of the Rev. David Youmans, who was born in New York State in 1771 and died in Markham Feb. 14th, 1856. He was a faithful & useful Minister of the Wesleyan Methodist Church 43 years and died in glorious hope of eternal life."

**April 9** – On the news this morning, the death of Prince Philip at age 99 was reported. He would have been 100 in June. A day in history. A light rain early this morning has greened up the lawn, a marked transformation after its winter dormancy.

Today I've looked into the story of David Youmans, as a follow-up to seeing his impressive but somewhat dishonoured grave marker yesterday. I say dishonoured because the grave marker no longer marks his resting-place, and is destined to crumble away unless something is done to better protect this and the other early grave markers from the Old Methodist Burying Ground, as the Ontario Genealogical Society identifies this place. Cameron Knight, who has a family connection to David Youmans, provided me with his relative's history: David Youmans was a member of a United Empire Loyalist family that were in Quebec as early as 1783. He apprenticed as a blacksmith at Lachine, Quebec, and then became a preacher for the Wesleyan Methodist Church. He

was ordained as a deacon in 1815, and appointed as a minister by 1817. Reverend Youmans was minister at the Methodist Church in Richmond Hill in 1818, and at various times between 1839 and 1855 served as minister at the Methodist Church in Markham Village. He seems to have served different churches in places where circuit preachers were not available. Youmans lived in Markham at least as early as 1819, and settled in Reesorville. His first wife was Sarah "Sally" Johnson. She died in 1833, and David Youmans married his second wife, Mary Dwyer, in 1839. Reverend Youmans' home was in the Vinegar Hill part of the community, as confirmed by township directories of the 1840s and 1850s, but he may have lived in different places at different times. In 1840, the family lived in a one-storey brick house that forms the north wing of 89 Main Street South. Reverend Youmans was nicknamed "The Old Hammer" due to his emphatic preaching style that was perhaps inspired by his earlier career as a blacksmith. He seems to have been a memorable character, said to have smoked a pipe while in the pulpit.

**April 10** – Noted that yellow forsythia bushes in the neighbourhood are now in bloom. On our property, there is a magnificent display of yellow daffodil blooms. Went to Toronto in the morning to pick up two large standing desks from an office that is down-sizing. A sunny day, good for sitting outside or for moving furniture in an open pickup truck. In the afternoon, I spoke to Donna Knight, our Peter Street historian, about the log house that used to stand at 13 Peter Street. She said it was moved to this location from the Reesor farm just south of here in the 1930s. The logs, as she recalls, were covered in siding. She didn't see it torn down to make way for the newer house that is there now but said another neighbour may know more details. Donna had a good Eastlake side chair in black walnut at the end of her driveway to give away, so I brought it home. I saw one just like it in a book called *Antiques You Can Decorate With*, by George Grotz, many years ago.

**April 11** – Today is the last in a series of warm days. April showers – at last! Rain in the forecast for all day and for a number of days into the coming week. Much needed for the trees, shrubs, plants in the garden and the lawn. By mid-afternoon, the rain turned light then stopped altogether. Purchased maple syrup from Lorne Smith, made in his sugar bush near Bobcaygeon. I asked him about the old Joseph Reesor farmhouse that was later owned by Douglas Isaac, and he recalled that the site of Markham District High School was purchased from Mr. Isaac. He didn't recall the house, but a former Markham Village resident, Cameron Knight, told me that when he attended the high school in the 1970s, the farmhouse was not far from the school property, but was in derelict condition.

In the afternoon, I went to the Milne Conservation Area south of Highway 7, where the Rouge River meanders through the valley, flowing in an easterly direction under the Main Street bridge. The river was wide, fast-flowing and olive green in colour after the rain. There is a steep bluff on the south side of the valley, and from the valley floor it is easy to see why the route of Main Street was made to deviate to the east and west to

address the topography in the early days, when the mills were active. Thinking about these vanished mills reminded me that long before there was a Markham Village, Reesorville or even an Upper Canada, there were generations of Indigenous peoples living in the Rouge watershed, attracted by the same advantages of flowing water, fertile soil, favourable topography and abundant flora and fauna that caught the attention of the later Euro-American colonial settlers. I wondered about nineteenth-century farmers encountering evidence of the land's former occupants as they walked behind their ploughs and teams, turning up discoloured areas of earth and finding stone projectile points and fragments of pottery decorated with incised patterns. They surely must have recognized these items as belonging to Indigenous peoples, but did they have any idea who these people were or how long ago the artifacts were left behind? An interpretive plaque on the east side of Main Street, which informs the reader about the Indigenous history of this land, describes how Thomas Milne found numerous artifacts on his property, indicating that a village once occupied the same location as his home, farm and mill complex.

**April 12** – A rainy day today, with cooler temperatures predicted for the week. As I wrote up my notes from yesterday's walk in the Rouge River valley, I thought about how, in the days before reading and writing were as universal as they are now, history was traditionally passed from one generation to another in the form of stories. The artifacts of the Indigenous peoples, collected by farmers as they worked their fields, only tell part of the story. While some farmers may have picked up artifacts as curios, there were other people who had a deeper understanding and appreciation of what these fragments of the past represented. When I worked for the Town of Richmond Hill, I became acquainted with the work of Arthur James "A. J." Clark (1876-1934), a Canadian sculptor with an interest in the archaeology of the Indigenous peoples of this region. He lived in the village of Maple from 1921 to 1927, then in the village of Richmond Hill from 1927 until 1934, during which time he investigated numerous archaeological sites which he learned about from farmers and other local residents. Although not professionally educated in his field of interest, he kept meticulous journals on his findings, beautifully illustrated with sketches of artifacts he encountered, plans of village sites, and diagrams of how he thought the artefact might have been used. His records, housed at the Canadian Museum of History, formed an important basis for the creation of modern-day archaeological master plans in York Region by documenting known archaeological sites.

**April 13** – Work going on with the train signal at the Main Street crossing. I began thinking about the script for a documentary on Markham Heritage Estates that is being produced by the Markham Arts Council. Spoke with the film-maker, Stefano Ruccia, about the project and talked about some ideas of how to approach this topic. I noticed the magnolia trees on Peter Street are close to blooming. Saw a robin at the front window when I walked into the living room mid-morning. It was on a branch of the smoke tree, and appeared to be looking into the house, maybe at me. I thought that was odd.

**April 14 & 15** – For most of the morning, I worked on the first draft of the script for the Markham Heritage Estates documentary. Got a lot done, more than I thought possible. Now I have to fact-check what I wrote – a project for tomorrow. Markham Heritage Estates is not technically in Markham Village, but is a near neighbour, right behind the Markham Museum property. In the afternoon, I walked around our neighbourhood taking pictures of a few old houses to have them done before the trees and shrubs come into leaf. On the way home I saw Marilyn Tufford, a relative of David Meyer, a prominent builder in this area from the 1860s up until the 1910s. She lives in the last house he built for himself in 1882, at 332 Main Street North. We talked about houses, old and new, and people's expectations about the amenities a house ought to have. We contrasted what today's standard for the number of bathrooms in a house with what people had in our youth, how families once managed with only one bathroom. Imagine that!

The next day I did my fact-checking of the Markham Heritage Estates documentary script, and added some other details as well. First draft sent to the film-maker. Some sunny periods expected, so there is potential for filming today.

**April 16** – Colder today, with a sharp wind out of the north-west. Even still, I did some work in the front garden bed, the one closest to the street where we typically plant colourful annuals. We're seeing purple finches at the bird feeder, and this morning one was right outside the front window. Beautiful little songbirds, so cheerful to see.

**April 17** – This morning was Prince Philip's funeral. Sunny in England, cloudy here. More of a tribute to his life than a sad occasion. Impressive military and clerical uniforms and well-chosen music. We watched the last half of the service. To see the Queen sitting on her own, wearing a black mask due to the pandemic, was very moving and made me feel her loneliness too somehow. Hard to explain. I planted a pink-flowing dogwood in the yard today as a token of remembrance. We also have a Canada 150 sugar maple planted on our property. Planting is a good way to mark significant occasions.

Went to Reesor's Market and Bakery in Stouffville this morning. The focus is on local, healthy food, some of it being traditional Mennonite foods like their pure pork sausage, sauerkraut and apple butter. This is a year-round business that is an outgrowth of the Reesor's Farm Market on Ninth Line in Markham. Both serve our area and Stouffville. The business was founded by farmer Jay Reesor and his wife, Miriam. This family descends from the Cedar Grove Reesors that settled in Markham in 1804. The farm market started in 1985, on a farm rented from Transport Canada that is now part of the Rouge National Urban Park at Elgin Mills Road and Ninth Line. The year-round store began as Reesor's Farm Kitchen in 2004, then became Reesor's Market and Bakery when the business moved to a more prominent location on Main Street, Stouffville in 2013. These businesses represent a history spanning more than two centuries of this

Pennsylvania-German Mennonite family's involvement in agriculture and their local community.

**April 18** – Yesterday evening, just before dusk, I walked the Forest Therapy trail at Springdale Park. After getting about half way through the last part of the pathway, the straight part that makes me think of a cathedral, I stopped and looked back along the double row of tall, white pines. At the end of my view, it looked misty and mysterious at the point where the path rises up a slight incline at the “cathedral’s” entrance. I thought I saw tree branches reaching over the path form a Gothic arch, enhancing the church-like effect. I returned to the same place the next morning, just to verify what I saw, and indeed the effect is real. The Gothic arch is formed by the bent branches of two trees, one in the foreground and one in the background. You have to be standing at just the right place along the path to perceive it.

**April 19** – At the dentist today for a regular cleaning. On my walk there I noticed that the magnolia flowers were just opening on some properties on Peter Street and Springdale Avenue. Maybe with today’s warm temperature and sunny skies they will open the rest of the way. The dental office, at 266 Main Street North, is in the old Mount Joy General Store and Post Office. Aretus Urmy kept store here from 1892, when the building was constructed, until he sold to George W. Rodd in 1905. I read in *Markham 1793-1900* that the Mount Joy Post Office, a sub-station of the post office in Stouffville, was opened here in 1907 and continued to operate until as recently as 1971.<sup>17</sup> The store and post office were owned and operated by the Graham family from 1915 to 1971 – 56 years. The store has a “boomtown front,” the architectural enhancement of scale and importance most often associated with the wooden towns that sprang up in the old west of the United States, the image we have from countless movies and TV shows with a western theme. We had our boomtowns too – Dawson City in the Yukon, and Cobalt, Ontario for instance. The idea was to give a one or one-and-a-half-storey building more of a presence on the street by creating the illusion of a flat-fronted commercial block. I doubt that many people were fooled.

**April 20** – A cooling trend in temperatures for mid-week. This morning, a sharp wind was blowing out of the west. Not much rain overnight – more was expected. I thought I would get the best of the day while the sun was shining, and headed to the trail system that runs through the Rouge Valley Park east of Main Street and south of Highway 7. There is another Forest Therapy Trail there that differs from the Springdale one in that it is a linear trail rather than a loop, and is a valley trail that follows the river as it meanders along. I saw the first blue jay that I have seen this year while on the trail. It was perched among some brush a little distance off the pathway near a pond that is separate from the river. I was struck by the brilliance of its blue, black and white colouring. At a point where the trail branches, just below the east end of Rouge Street, I looked up to the tableland above the valley floor to note the Glen Rouge mill house and barn. I then tried to see what might remain of the mill operation itself, even though the landscape here has been transformed by nature and by more recent work on the trail



system. A deep gully that crosses the path up the hill to Charlotte Angliss Road looks like it might be part of the old, trident-shaped tail race.

When I returned home, I consulted an old plan of Markham Village to see the historic layout of the house, mill, pond and other features to try to relate the map to what I observed in the valley. Next time I visit here I will take a copy of the map with me to help get me oriented in the present-day landscape. The grist mill was established by Archibald Barker about 1847 and passed through the ownership of a number of others before it was demolished in 1920. The mill house at 61 Rouge Street was built in 1879 by George W. Reesor, the mill-owner at the time, to replace an earlier frame dwelling. It's set back quite far from the street, different from all the other houses. The mill itself was located a little to the east of the house, accessed by a road that used to run down the hill, at the far end of Rouge Street.

**April 21** – The *Farmer's Almanac* was right! A spring fall of snow overnight covered the ground, trees, and shrubs, but did not stay on the pavement. It was more than just a dusting. Very light snow flurries continued in the morning, not amounting to much. As the sun shone, and the snow on the emerging leaves of trees and shrubs began to melt, it looked like cotton growing. By just around lunchtime most of the snow had melted, except for in shady spots. In the afternoon and evening, strong winds from the north-west brought in colder temperatures – down to freezing tonight. The last of wintry weather?

**April 22 – Earth Day** – The day began with a frosting of snow on the grass. Freezing temperatures this morning, but a bright day with sunshine. Before lunch, I walked with my son James as he picked up trash in Cedar Valley Park on behalf of Centennial College. People walking through the park, some with dogs, some without, expressed their appreciation for the clean-up. Most of the garbage seemed to be things that blew into the natural area from recycling boxes rather than litter. All of a sudden, a snow squall popped up with pellets like little bits of styrofoam. A gusty wind in the afternoon made it feel colder than the actual temperature.

**April 23** – A return to warmer temperatures. The last cold days and nights do not seem to have damaged the emerging plants too much, except for the blooms on some magnolia trees. The other day, when I was talking to Lorne Smith about the Glen Rouge mill site, he told me about how the concrete dam in that area used to have a bridge over it, and there were cottages in the valley on the south side of the river. This was a private park called Glen Woods Park, first run by the Rolph family and later by the Miller family. When Hurricane Hazel happened in 1954, a building that housed a refreshment stand and dance hall was knocked off its foundation and the cottages swept away by the force of the water. Lorne mentioned visiting there with the late Murray Pipher several years ago and reminiscing about the old park. Murray and his wife Isobel were the owners of the mill house from 1962 until the 1990s. Murray Pipher was an accomplished artist, specializing in acrylic paintings that depict traditional agricultural

scenes in old Markham Township. His depictions of horses are particularly striking. I have one of his paintings in my dining room, titled *Like Father, Like Son*, which shows a farmer instructing his son about the use of a wood and iron single-furrow plough behind a team of fine horses.

**April 24-25** – A warm, sunny day on Saturday, good for working outside. American goldfinches, male and female, seen for the first time at the bird feeder. Trout lilies coming up in wooded areas. Beautiful, delicate yellow flowers. The next day, a light rain fell in the morning, with cooler temperatures. Planned to look for trilliums in Raymerville Woodlot, but instead bought two trillium plants from Sheridan Nurseries to try in the garden. Beginning in the afternoon, a gusty and cold west wind came up, sometimes changing direction and coming from the north-west. Not a day for planting, with a frost advisory issued. Cooler temperatures predicted for the next few days.

**April 26** – The area of Main Street North and Robinson Street, in the heart of the commercial core of Markham Village, is a place of civic pride. A parking lot at the south-west corner looks a bit like a town square, but it really isn't one – nevertheless its street frontage has a public seating area, with an interpretive plaque that introduces historical points of interest throughout the village. In the same place, a large coniferous tree becomes the focal point for the annual tree-lighting that begins the winter holiday season. In the spring, summer and fall, a farmers' market is held here on Saturdays. Bordering this ersatz town square to the south is the impressive bulk of the Old Town Hall, the centre of Markham Village's municipal administration and numerous community-related activities from 1881 until the 1940s, when the property was sold to become a movie theatre. I can remember travelling through Markham Village in the early 1980s, before the building was restored. The theatre had closed by that time, and it was difficult to imagine how the façade of the historical building could be brought back to its original appearance. The restored building is something of a compromise. The window glazing style was re-done in the Georgian style, rather than the simpler Italianate, and the brickwork, which was originally dyed red with decorative accents in buff or "white brick" is now a mixture of buff and variegated brick, so the contrasting wall treatment is muted. Overall, the Old Town Hall restoration retained a significant landmark in the village from an architectural point of view, but it is no longer a public building but rather an office and restaurant.

One special point of interest about the Old Town Hall that I found in a detailed research report in the City's heritage files, prepared by Su Murdoch, historical consultant, was that the renowned Canadian poet, E. Pauline Johnson, gave a recital in the public hall on the occasion of the Queen's birthday in May of 1892 – the Queen at the time being Victoria. Emily Pauline Johnson, or Tekahionwake, was the daughter of George Henry Martin Johnson, an Indigenous interpreter for the Anglican Church, who became Chief of the Six Nations, and his English-born wife, Emily Susanna Howells. Markham Village was but one of many stops this gifted writer and performer made on her tours throughout Canada, the United States and England during the period 1884-1909. She

performed dramatic recitations of poems with patriotic themes and poems that reflected her Indigenous heritage, changing costumes part way through her readings to represent the themes she was presenting. Her classic poem, *The Song My Paddle Sings*, comes to mind. I'm trying to remember if I learned this poem in elementary school, but I'm not sure. It seems familiar to me, but where did I read it first?

**April 27** – Back to the parking lot at Robinson and Main. I am reminded that this parking lot served an IGA grocery store when our family moved to Markham in 1998. The store closed not long after we moved here, and was replaced by a gym. Now people living in Markham Village have to drive to the nearest grocery store. This got me thinking about what kinds of businesses are essential in a large village or small town, to make them self-sufficient for the daily necessities of life. Of course, nearly every community in Ontario has its LCBO liquor store and Beer Store; even the very smallest of places have them. Other than those businesses, the basic list I came up with includes the following: grocery store, hardware store, drug store, gas station, restaurant to serve locals, coffee shop, convenience store, bank, post office, public library, places of worship, schools, dentist office, doctor's office, lawyer's office, and lastly, a funeral home. It wasn't so long ago that Markham Village had all of these, but some businesses and services, following the suburban model, have left the compact, walkable business centre of the village and are now found in plazas or malls on the outskirts.

Before IGA, the parking lot and gym property was the site of the c. 1880 Franklin House Hotel, the late Victorian, Italianate-style former companion of the Old Town Hall. The hotel had reached a point in its existence where communities like Markham Village no longer needed a facility of this kind, the same being true of a blacksmith shop, carriage works, boot and shoe maker, harness shop and many of the other essential services of the previous age – the time of the horse and buggy. This got me thinking about how communities change as lifestyles and technologies evolve. What you find on Main Street at any given time reflects how things are constantly changing.

**April 28** – Two instances of heavy rainfall during the night. More expected today, which is good for the grass, gardens and trees. A thunder storm came through late morning. It's time to file tax returns for 2020, and the office where we take our tax returns to be prepared is at 107 Main Street North. Until recently there was a music school on the second floor. From the street the building has a typical commercial front of the 1950s or 1960s, but behind this modern-era façade is an old house with painted brick and a hipped roof. At first glance, when you turn the corner and see the south and east walls of the older part of the building from Robinson Street, this looks like a house of the 1910s to 1920s. It turns out to be more interesting than that. The Markham Museum has an archival photograph of the commercial block next door to the north at 115-117 Main Street North that happens to show some of the left-hand side of the original façade of its neighbour. There is an elaborately panelled front door, decorative wood trim on the eaves, and a rooftop belvedere or roofed skylight visible on this elegant two-storey house in the Italianate style. This brick house was the residence of Alexander and Meta

Mairs. Alexander Mairs was a barrister and solicitor in the village. Before he married, he lived at Hamilton Hall's hotel across the street. The house was built *circa* 1872. Edith M. Mairs, the couple's daughter, is remembered for her important role in the establishment of the Girl Guides in Canada. In 1912 she was the first General Secretary of the National Council.<sup>18</sup> She grew up right here, in Markham Village, and is a nationally significant person.

**April 29** – A grey and rainy day, but with enough breaks in the rain to allow for some work in the garden. Today, my son James and I expanded a portion of a garden bed on the south side of the property, near the back where there is more sunshine. This will be a location for native plants to attract butterflies and bees. We moved a patch of orange daylilies, the old-fashioned kind you often see on farms or by the roadside in rural areas. These particular daylilies come from a plant rescue I did back in the early 1990s, and have moved with us from house to house. I salvaged these old-time plants from the Lynett-Palmer farm on the east side of Bayview Avenue, north of Major Mackenzie Drive, Richmond Hill, before the land was serviced for development. Who knows how long these daylilies had been established on that old farm, and how many times they had been passed along from family to family. The house dated from 1861, and was built of solid brick, no doubt intended to last for many generations. It was demolished to make way for a subdivision.

**April 30** – The last day of April is going out with a bit of drama as strong winds from the north-west have been building since mid-morning. Some very strong gusts are expected, according to a special weather statement. We took down the bird feeder to protect it from potential damage. A big old willow tree was knocked down on the south side of Highway 7, east of Main Street. You could see how rotted the inside was where it snapped apart. Tonight, the temperature is supposed to go down to near freezing. Earlier, I walked in the Raymerville woodlot to see if the trilliums were up and blooming. No trilliums were to be seen, but lots of an invasive plant called garlic mustard. This invasive species crowds out the native plants in the forest understory and change the character of our wild places. There is so much of this garlic mustard that I doubt that much can be done about it. I looked it up when I returned home to learn that it was brought from Europe in the 1800s as an edible herb. The lobed, first year leaves are what I see most of the time, and they have a distinctive smell at certain times, but not right now.

**May 1** – May is supposed to be cooler than usual, and wetter, according to the *Farmer's Almanac*. More like a typical April than what we're used to in May. It has been a cooler spring, and our heat is still on because of the lower temperatures at night. In an old house like this, which has not been totally gutted and done over, but rather changed by degrees over the years, there is evidence of several different heating systems. Old photos show tall brick chimneys on the front and back of the roof ridge. These probably served wood stoves, one in the parlour and one in the kitchen or dining room. On the back wall of the west bedroom, a patch in the plaster shows where a shelf chimney was

once located. Most interesting of all is a metal grate in the ceiling of the parlour, which allowed heat to get to the second floor hallway. That was probably the extent of the heat for the upstairs bedrooms when the house was new in the mid to late 1890s. Today we have much higher expectations for heat throughout our homes, but in former times people were used to putting on extra blankets when going to bed at night.

In the parlour and dining room are metal heat registers at the base of the wall which have a Gothic-arched design, and cold air returns in the floor. These, I think, are the remnants of a coal furnace that was the next update in the heating system here. A metal bracket mounted to the wainscotting, next to the main floor bathroom door, looks like it was some kind of control for the furnace below, a damper, perhaps. The casting bears the following words: DEASE FOUNDRY CO LIMITED. Lastly, there are modern registers in the floor which serve a high-efficiency gas furnace but could have previously served an oil furnace. This more recent ductwork has been changed at least three times. When we moved in, two of the registers were not connected to any ductwork at all, and to our astonishment, the back bedroom didn't have a register. When all is said and done, an old house like this is difficult to heat evenly, because the ductwork has been installed in such a way as to work around what has existed since late Victorian times. It's just part of what it is like to live in a century home.

**May 2** – A quiet Sunday morning in Markham Village. A good day to take photographs of buildings on Main Street, while the traffic was very light. The sky was cloudy-bright, ideal conditions for photography. After a while, the sky darkened somewhat, then a light rain began to fall. That was it for my walk into the heart of the village. A very spring-like feeling in the air. The sky cleared mid-morning, and the sun came out. Later in the morning, while it was still sunny, there were several loud booms of thunder, but no storm followed. More rain expected later.

**May 3** – This week was forecast to be cooler than seasonal, with rain predicted for the first three days. Unexpectedly, it was sunny for a while mid-morning. Yesterday afternoon, while continuing to take more photographs in the south-east backstreets of the village, my wife Linda and I met Russ Gregory of the Gregory Design Group as he was leaving his office. Russ has designed many new homes and additions within the Markham Village and Unionville heritage conservation districts. In 2019, he relocated his office from an industrial unit in Buttonville to a heritage house at 16 Church Street. This is a really exceptional example of a heritage building being brought back to useful life after a lengthy period of abandonment. Anywhere else, this house would have most certainly been torn down due to its condition. The *circa* 1860 house had been empty and neglected for many years before it underwent a thorough restoration for office and residential use. In spite of its poor condition, the building was earmarked for preservation for its historical and architectural value. It was built by David Cash, a pump and fanning mill manufacturer whose business and residence were nearby, on Main Street. David Cash married into the Eckardt family of Unionville, known for their association with the cause of William Lyon Mackenzie during time of the Rebellion of



1837. Cash was definitely in the rebel camp. This modest Ontario Cottage, of plank-on-plank (stacked lumber) construction and with Classic Revival details, seems to have been built to be rented to workers in local industries. In 1898, the property was sold to John and Ellen Kellett. John Kellett was a baker, and an old fire insurance map from the early 1900s shows that his bakery was once attached to the rear of his home. Neighbours must have been regularly treated to the aroma of baking bread. Did they tire of it, or was it always welcome?

Next door to the east of this house is the former site of the Markham Village Congregational Church – hence the name, Church Street. It was a frame building that stood from the mid-nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, and served as a shoe factory for a while after its church use ended. The only photograph I have ever seen of the old church was in the Markham Village Tweedsmuir History in the collection of the Markham Museum. There is a row of townhouses on the former church property now, fronting onto Franklin Street.

**May 4** – Markham Village Lanes at 144 Main Street North was built in the late 1980s as a destination commercial centre that included storefronts both on the street and within a mews. When the centre was constructed, the post-modern architectural style was in vogue. The building's red brick walls accented with buff-coloured brick, as well as some of the architectural details, referenced what was popular in this area back in the late nineteenth century. This new construction mixed well with the three heritage buildings that were incorporated into this major development at the north end of the village's commercial strip. Over time, the lustre wore off the Lanes and many of the interior spaces became stubbornly vacant. What might have worked well in Yorkville didn't seem to suit Markham's suburban culture. Now in 2021, changes are coming. A six-storey retirement residence is being planned to replace the 1980s structure, while retaining the heritage buildings that currently exist. On a recent walk along Water Street, a couple of local residents stopped to talk to me as they did some door-knocking in their neighbourhood to raise community awareness of the potential impact of the new development. Yes, it will be a big change. The new building will be a much more intense use of the land, and along Water Street, a large building mass will fill an area which is now a parking lot.

**May 5** – The federal government has recently mailed out the forms for the 2021 Census, and we have received ours. In former times, a census-taker would go door-to-door to interview the inhabitants of each household to obtain the information. Now, the process is online. In the nineteenth century, the residents of Markham Village were mainly of Pennsylvania-German (Swiss-German) origin, other Americans with an English background, and families that had come to Canada directly from England, Scotland and Ireland. That was what diversity looked like in this area prior to modern times, before immigration from many other countries began to increase following the Second World War. I have often heard that the City of Markham is the most diverse municipality in Canada. This new census will confirm if that is still the case or if some other place has

become the most diverse. I have heard Lorne Smith speak a number of times about how our community has always been a community of newcomers, thus relating Markham's history to present residents of our city. He makes a good point. Our local history is a continuously-evolving process. We have much more in common with the people of past generations than we realize.

**May 6** – Warm and sunny today, the best weather in a while. The local magnolia trees are magnificently in bloom, and I wonder if the cooler temperatures we have had since they budded have somehow extended the life of the showy blossoms. I saw the first tentative blooms on a white lilac this morning, in front of the funeral home on Main Street. There are vast carpets of yellow dandelions in public spaces and on roadsides. Imagine how many seeds will be blown everywhere after the flowering!

**May 7** - Lorne Smith asked me what I might know about the origin of George Street and nearby Washington Street on the east side of the village. Is it a mere coincidence that these two street names appear together, to apparently proclaim the name of the first president of the United States of America? And then there is Franklin Street, nearby. These street names were in place early on in the history of Markham Village, as they appear on the village plan of 1850. Certainly, many families in the early community came from the U.S. and were not necessarily United Empire Loyalists, since most arrived in the early years of the nineteenth century. Even though American families like the Reesors' had decided to leave their homes south of the border, perhaps they retained sympathies for the revered leaders of their homeland. I did some research today and learned that there was a Washington family in Markham Village. Stephen Washington and his wife, Elizabeth Little Washington, were English immigrants that first settled in the area of Scarboro Village. I read in *A History of Scarborough*, edited by Robert R. Bonis, that Stephen Washington (1786-1865) was an ardent supporter of William Lyon Mackenzie and the reform cause, and also of the Methodist Church. In fact, Washington United Church in Scarborough was named in his honour. There is some suggestion that he was a lay-preacher.<sup>19</sup> The Washingtons' moved to Markham Village *circa* 1848, having retired from farming. Their son Joseph was employed here as a tanner. Perhaps he worked in the Robinson tannery. How the name "George Street" may have originated is a little more difficult to find out. George Wilson was a prominent builder in the early days of Markham Village. He and his sons were the builders of brick houses throughout the village, including two on George Street. Was he the "George" of George Street? My idea is simply an educated guess.

**May 8** – There's a pleasant oasis of green in the midst of the paved parking lots that serve the local GO Train station. At the south-west corner of Main Street North and Beech Street, the Dorothea Moss Garden is a well-tended spot, with three garden beds and benches for anyone who chooses to rest here a while. Right now, the garden beds have daffodils, tulips, and hyacinths in bloom, and emerging rose bushes and peonies that will flower in time. You can see the care that goes into maintaining this tribute to a dedicated volunteer, the late Dorothea (Barkey) Moss, who was a director of the

Markham Village Conservancy while the organization championed the preservation and restoration of the old train station.

**May 9 – Mother’s Day.** We’ve created a fenced-in raised garden bed in the back yard, to deal with the damage to the plants being done by local wildlife – rabbits and skunks are the main culprits. Last year everything we planted in this bed, except for some petunias I put in to add some colour to the vegetable garden, were utterly destroyed. Our neighbourhood, with a creek and valley system nearby, is rich in wildlife, including squirrels, racoons, chipmunks, rabbits, skunks and occasionally, foxes and coyotes. About three years ago, we saw a beaver making its way along the railway tracks just north of the train station, looking quite out-of-place. No sightings of deer or bears though.

**May 10 –** Walked south into to the village this morning, the day at first cool but bright, with a nearly cloudless sky. Many trees coming into leaf right now. I looked to see where the really large, old trees are located, and found there are more around than I thought there would be. Mainly black walnuts at the rear of properties fronting on Main Street. These trees are of historical interest in connection with the Pennsylvania-German settlement of the area. In *Markham 1793-1900* it is noted that the late historian G. Elmore Reaman wrote in *The Trail of the Black Walnut* that Pennsylvania-Germans settlers looked for places where black walnut trees grew as a sign of fertile, limestone-based soil for agriculture.<sup>20</sup> I have also heard stories about these settlers bringing black walnut saplings with them to Markham. One such tree, said to have been brought here by the Heise family, used to stand in front of the Heise farmhouse, west of Victoria Square. The farm was at the north-east corner of Leslie Street and Elgin Mills Road, now a part of Richmond Hill. I measured the circumference of the trunk of that tree with Janet Fayle, the local historian, in the early 1990s. The tree was battle-scarred from lightning strikes and old age, but was majestic in scale. The trunk was 12 feet in circumference. The house, tree and barns are all gone now, replaced with commercial big-box development.

Closer to home, a noteworthy giant of a tree is found on the west side of Albert Street, just south of Joseph Street. It is a Bur Oak with a trunk that I estimated, by pacing it off, to be four and a half feet in diameter. I have heard it could be as much as 200 years old, which means it was here before Markham Village was much of a settlement. It’s hard to photograph this spectacular tree due to the closeness of everything in the immediate neighbourhood. I recall an even larger Bur Oak tree on the south side of Church Street, a little west of Ninth Line, that was a noteworthy local landmark. The tree appeared to be in good health and set to go on for many more years, but one day in the early 2000s I drove by to see the tree in the process of being cut down. It was unthinkable to me that someone could decide to commit such an act of vandalism to the landscape – the tree was not even close to the house. I wonder how many other people in Markham Village were aware of this tree and its loss. We just don’t seem to have many truly huge, truly ancient trees in this part of Ontario.

**May 11** – There's an old post and wire fence that encloses the back yard of a heritage house at 47 Washington Street. You can see the fence from Joseph Street, because this is a corner lot that goes right through to Jerman Street. I think this may be the oldest fence in the village, perhaps dating from the 1910s to the 1940s. The looped wire design is decorative, with a tighter pattern near the bottom, designed to keep animals out of the garden. I have a book in my library, simply titled *Fences*, written by Harry Symons and illustrated by the noted Canadian artist C. W. Jefferys. This book was published by The Ryerson Press, Toronto, the same year I was born, 1958. On page 87 there is a pen and ink drawing of this exact style of fence. The author wrote:

"...a neat and efficient wire garden fence, fastened to its round posts by staples. It was not a cheap fence, but it kept out smaller animals such as rabbits and ground hogs, which otherwise played hob with those cabbages and the lettuce and delicious green peas."<sup>21</sup>

**May 12** – Today was the beginning of a trend toward warmer temperatures – at last May-like weather! The sky was cloudless and brilliant blue as this morning's walk took me north on Main Street. I passed by a new landmark on this old street, that is at the same time a reminder of past years in Mount Joy. The Buddhist Prajna Temple at 313 Main Street North is a fairly recent addition to the community and speaks to Markham's diversity in a meaningful way. It promotes traditional Chinese culture, charity work, and humanitarian endeavors. The Temple is new, but the building dates from 1877, when an offshoot of the Mennonite Church built a brick place of worship in a rather conservative rendition of the Italianate style. In the early days, this was the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church, later to be known as the Missionary Church. The original building is not obvious from the street when driving by – a modern façade from the 1960s is the thing you notice. Travelling on foot, at a pace better suited to noticing what is around you, a glance at the south wall reveals the building's Late Victorian architecture. The conversion of the building to a Buddhist temple has been, on the exterior, a change in symbols and signage, complemented by traditional statuary and a front garden ornamented with carefully placed, rounded stones and boulders.

In the twilight, I saw a little brown bat flitting around at the Cedar Valley wetland. The was the first I had seen for quite a while.

**May 13** – The Ramer Cemetery is an unexpected historic site found at the south end of Wales Avenue, a residential backstreet in the Mount Joy neighbourhood. The railway line serving GO Transit borders the eastern boundary, which is an odd juxtaposition of a quiet place of rest with a busy and often noisy transportation corridor. This old farm cemetery, owned and maintained by the City of Markham, has only four standing monuments. The rest have been laid flat and placed on a sturdy concrete slab. Most of these grave markers show the effects of years of carelessness and weathering. Several are only fragments, and some are simple fieldstones which may have been grave-markers at a time before stone engravers were locally available. Lorne Smith, in a video history of the Ramer Cemetery, notes that one of these fieldstones bears the faint date, "1819." The grey stone marker of Abr'hm Remer (Abraham Ramer, 1760-1846), the

family patriarch from Pennsylvania, is written in German. Another marker, only a fragment, is made of a dark black stone (slate?) and bears a partial inscription written in finely-carved Roman letters. This stone, and that of Abraham Ramer, have a great feeling of antiquity about them. They remind me of very old grave markers I have seen in New England, which date from the 1700s or earlier.

**May 14** – On my way to the Ramer Cemetery yesterday I passed by a property at the north-west corner of Gleason Avenue and Wales Avenue that has a very large kitchen garden in the back yard, in the process of being prepared for planting. This garden is on the scale of examples I have seen in association with family farms. I was surprised to see that it is not fenced, so I wonder how the owners have fared with local wildlife getting in there and doing damage. On the southern boundary of this corner property is a long, narrow garden with an abundance of peonies, tulips and a few rose bushes. I counted 15 peonies at least. I look forward to visiting again when they are in bloom. I'm sure it will be an impressive site. The house at 24 Wales Avenue was purchased by James McCowan in 1955 when he retired from farming in north-east Scarborough. This is the same family for whom McCowan Road is named. They came to Upper Canada from Lesmahagow, Scotland in the 1830s and first settled near the lakefront in Scarborough Township. In 1972, the property on Wales Avenue was transferred by the heirs of James McCowan to George McCowan. It is interesting how this farming family carried their tradition of having an ample kitchen garden with them when they moved into town.

**May 15** – Driving up Highway 48, north of Mount Joy, I noticed that the William Clarry house has been demolished within the last two weeks. This old farmhouse, near the south-west corner of Highway 48 and Major Mackenzie Drive, was built *circa* 1855 by a family that became established here in the 1840s. The farmhouse was located within a property in the process of being developed for a dense community of townhouses. It was one of those old buildings that was supposed to be preserved and incorporated into new development, with all of the available heritage conservation and planning safeguards in place to bring that about, but was lost nevertheless. A series of owners played the long game of demolition by neglect, and there came a point when this once well-constructed solid brick house in the Georgian architectural tradition was rendered beyond saving. A dedicated lack of attention to the state of roof shingles over a period of 15 years or more permitted water to do its work to effectively weaken both masonry and wood. Sad to see another landmark of our rural heritage disappear from the landscape.

**May 16** – The warmest day so far this May. Things are a bit dry due to minimal rainfall lately. Yesterday there was a brief shower of very light rain, too light to even wet the pavement. Our garden beds have needed much watering to freshen them up and to help new plants get established. The garden centres I have visited over the last few days have been very busy, with the forecast looking favourable for planting.



I looked into the Clarry family story a little more today. They came here from England. William Clarry's parents, Henry and Mary (Crosby) Clarry must have lived in this area quite early, because their son William was born in Markham in 1831. They lived in or near the west side of Markham Village at the time of George Walton's Directory of 1837.<sup>21</sup> Mary Clarry was the sister of Chauncey Crosby, an early merchant in the south end of the village. William Clarry married Jane Ann Reynolds, the daughter of United Empire Loyalists. Before they built their brick house north of Mount Joy, they lived on the Reynolds homestead in Locust Hill. One of the children of William and Jane Reynolds was Frederick A. Clarry of Toronto, who was an early owner of the Maple Leaf Woolen Mill on Robinson Street. The farm stayed in the ownership of the Clarry family until 1876. Members of the Clarry family still live in the vicinity of Markham Village. This makes me wonder how many descendants of early settler families continue to reside in the same community as their ancestors.

**May 17** - As the petals of magnolias fall and scatter on the ground, this is the time of lilac blooms - purple, dark purple and white. This is when you notice how common the common lilac is. They really stand out. For the rest of the growing season, these shrubs just become part of the general greenery. Lilacs are an old-time ornamental plant, not native to North America but rather brought here in colonial times. I've read they originated in the Balkans region of Europe. They were, and still are, traditionally planted at house-corners, fence-corners and as hedging. Out in the country, clumps of lilacs are often markers of a vanished homestead. When left alone, these clumps can become enormous in size, and very tall. An old stone farmhouse I have visited near Whitevale in Pickering, the *circa* 1830 home of my wife's ancestor, Nathaniel Hastings Jr., has a large lilac hedge on its west side. This hedge is so large that an arched opening through it has been maintained a gateway into the rear yard, probably for generations. In Markham Village, a large purple lilac marks the north-west corner of an old brick house at 19 George Street. Not far away, an impressive lilac hedge with light and dark purple blooms encloses the rear yard of the attractive Queen Anne Revival house at 183 Main Street North.

**May 18** - On a recent walk through the backstreets of the village, I noticed that an old house has had its wood windows replaced with plain, vinyl casements. Was this work done with a permit or not? Probably not, because of the use of vinyl. This got me thinking about how incremental changes in the heritage district, week by week, month by month, and year by year take away more of the actual heritage character of the neighbourhood. Sometimes, entire buildings are removed and replaced, but most of the time it's about small-scale alterations that are not much in themselves, but as the number of changes accumulate over time, the effect is transformational. In a few years, what will be left of what is truly old? I've heard it said that "if it looks right, it is right," which for the average person is just fine, but there is so much more to learn and enjoy from experiencing something genuine, something authentic. Someone in the process of removing time-worn old pine floors from an important house from the 1850s once made the comment to me "what are we really saving here anyway?" Simple answer: the

evidence of the passage of time, and the lives lived in the building. Built heritage touched by the generations of people that lived there.

Walking through the Tannery Pond wetland, I think I might have heard the croak of a bullfrog, or some other kind of frog. Redwing blackbirds were at first much agitated by my presence. One scolded me from a tree branch as I sat on a bench at the midpoint of the boardwalk, but settled down after a while to allow me to be immersed in the morning-time sounds of the wetland. A few minutes later, continuing north, through Cedar Valley, I noticed vivid, purple violets along the sides of the path. As I crossed the bridge next to Raymerville Drive, I looked to the south and saw sunlight shimmering on the fast-moving water of Robinson Creek as it flowed and gurgled around the boulders that punctuate its bed. The soft morning light was perfect to highlight the effect. The sunlight shimmered silver in some places, while the surface of the water was dark where the bank-side greenery shaded the creek. A moment of sublime beauty that made me pause during my walk towards home.

**May 19** – Today is a continuation of warmer than average blue sky days, almost summer-like but without the high humidity. Very nice. This morning I walked a new trail in the Rouge National Urban Park (I tend to shorten it to “Rouge Park”). The trail begins behind the park’s field office at the south-east corner of Reesor Road and Elgin Mills Road, and makes its way south and east, skirting farm fields, woodlots and hedgerows until it meets the York-Durham Line. There are big, wide views of the agricultural landscape in certain spots, and in one location there is a distant, well-maintained barn complex that I can only describe as majestic and completely in harmony with its setting of woods and fields. Historically, this was the Hoover-Rennie farm on Lot 23, Concession 10. The contours of the land are accentuated by the edges of open fields where they meet hedgerows and woodlots. The fields are a patchwork of tilled brown earth, springtime green, or a medley of colours and textures where old farm fields are being naturalized.

Some might wonder, if this is an account of a year in old Markham Village, why am I writing about the Rouge Park? Markham Village, before large-scale development began on its borders in the 1950s, was once surrounded by farmsteads, fields, orchards and woodlots not too different from what can be still seen in the park. There was farmland right behind our house until the 1980s. My point is to help people remember that the community is rooted in the agricultural past, far away in time in the immediate vicinity of the village, but only a short drive away from the village of today.

**May 20** – A continuation of warmer than seasonal days, with no significant rainfall since the beginning of the month. It feels more like July than May, and we have a patch of lawn that gets a lot of sun which has begun to turn the silvery green colour of mid-summer drought. The garden beds need watering every day, and if you dig a little, it is surprising how even a few hours after watering the soil becomes powder-dry again.

Yesterday, I let the hose run for 45 minutes to water the London plane tree at the front of our property. Its leaves are just coming out.

Mid-afternoon, and the sun shone brightly as some of this morning's cloud cover has moved on. Too warm to work outside. I thought a cold beer would have been nice about then. Markham got its first craft brewery in 2016, and Markham Village was lucky enough to be the chosen location. The Rouge River Brewing Company on Bullock Drive is part of a larger craft brewery movement, one that I first became acquainted with in the late 1980s when I was introduced to the beers of Conner's in Don Mills by a couple of friends of mine. The Rouge River Brewing Company has won awards for its small-batch products and is becoming well-known in craft beer circles. Less well known is another brewery in the Rouge Valley, Vinegar Hill, that was operating in the 1850s, and probably earlier. This brewery, shown on the oldest map of the village, was on the north side of today's Fisher Court, near the river. The Assessment Roll of 1855 reveals the owner was Archibald Barker, a prominent businessman in the village who ran a store and post office, among other enterprises. The brewery was operated at that time by Charles Mullins. From the building outline shown on Plan 18, the brewery was a substantial structure. It was probably built of brick or stone, like other old Ontario breweries I have heard of. More research is needed to know how long the business operated, but by the 1870s the building seems to have been converted to an ashery where laundry soap was made by a Mr. Thomas O'Hara – producing another kind of suds, so it seems! <sup>22</sup>

**May 21** – Working on drawings of an old house in a rural area of Whitchurch-Stouffville that is going to be demolished and replaced with a much larger new residence. Creating a record of heritage buildings that will be lost is another way of preserving them and the information they contain about historic building technology and architecture. Fred Robbins measured and photographed this mid-nineteenth century tenant farmer's house as part of a research report he's preparing. I'm helping out by producing floor plans in my drafting studio in a corner of my garage, not using computer-assisted drafting but using traditional hand-drawing techniques that I learned in high school. My drafting table of wood and iron dates from *circa* 1910 and came from the offices of Dominion Engineering in Montreal. I bought it for \$20 in the 1970s. I had to stop my work for the day when the temperature was on its way to 31 degrees (about 88 degrees Fahrenheit), feeling a few degrees hotter with the humidity.

**May 22-24 – Victoria Day Long Weekend.** Generally, there has been a cooling trend and it has been pretty dry in terms of rainfall. Lilac blooms are at their peak right now, and some iris flowers are blooming too. The yellow ones at the front of the house opened up yesterday. Beautiful. A person walking by commented that you don't see the yellow iris so much, mainly the purple.

On May 24, Queen Victoria's birthday, there was a perfect afternoon of sunshine, mild temperatures, and gentle breezes. I sat on my very Victorian front porch, resplendent in

all of its late 1890s wooden decoration, thinking of what I had earlier looked up about the background of Victoria Day. It's only celebrated in Canada, and it was first recognized as a holiday here in 1845, not many years into Victoria's reign, which began in 1837 and lasted 64 years. After the Queen's death in 1901, the holiday was formalized by Canada's Parliament. Victoria was monarch when the British Empire was at the height of its power and influence. Canada became a nation during her reign, when our young country was busy with railway-building, the growth of cities and towns, the expansion of industry and commerce, and the emergence of the west as a vast, agricultural frontier. From what I've read, the Late Victorian period was a time of optimism, confidence and patriotism – a Canada so artfully portrayed in humorist Stephen Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, based on Orillia, Ontario. Closer to home, Richmond Hill's spring fair, established in 1849, was timed to coincide with the Queen's Birthday. I'm sure many people from Markham attended and exhibited there. For many years, fireworks have been a feature of what most people today refer to as the "Long Weekend" or "May 2-4." With the provincial stay-at-home order still in effect, I don't believe any big public fireworks displays were planned, but this year, there was an extra effort from local people to put on their own fireworks to light up the night sky. To add to that, kids in our neighbourhood typically set off some firecrackers after dark. Our dog became very uneasy when she heard the first "pop-pop-pop" sound, and just when you think that you've heard the last firecracker, there's a few more.

**May 25** – This afternoon, I walked down to 162 Main Street North to photograph what I think is the most spectacular wisteria vine in bloom that I have ever seen. The white-painted wood pergola on the south side of the 1887 Corson-Mingay House is covered in cascading, pale blue blooms. The pergola is large – a piece of architecture really – and serves as a privacy screen for the rear area of the building, which is now an insurance broker's office.

On my way back to Peter Street, I was stopped by a neighbour on Beech Street who is a great observer of the daily activity on this short but busy road next to the Markham GO parking lot. He told me about an extraordinary wildlife sighting he recently experienced while walking a trail through the small ravine that follows Mount Joy Creek, north of Markham District High School. My neighbour described how he came upon a healthy specimen of a wolf, which he estimated weighed around 120 pounds. He commented on how the wolf silently moved through the brush, keeping a watchful eye on him, but going about her own business. I was surprised to hear about a wolf being spotted so close to home, though I have seen news reports of the odd bear making its way into the built-up areas of our region, always an unusual and noteworthy occurrence.

P.S. I later learned that it was likely a coyote that my neighbour saw. They are somewhat larger than people think, but smaller than a wolf.

**May 26** – This morning I enjoyed the shady parkette beneath the Gothic-arched metal sculpture at Main and Church Streets, a public space created by the stopping up of a short section of Church Street. The sculpture makes me think of nineteenth century ironwork – bridges and machinery – and how Markham Village was once an important regional centre of manufacturing. Maybe that was the artist’s intent. I watched Main Street traffic, busy, but not as busy as a typical year due to the on-going stay at home order. Usually, Main Street traffic doesn’t move so fast or so freely. Motorists were driving past in both directions, uninhibited by volume of traffic and perhaps even exceeding the speed limit. As a direct route to Highway 407, and with many access points, this is a popular commuter route. As development continues to the north of the village, it is inevitable that traffic will only increase. During “normal” times, to drive north or south on Main Street takes a measure of patience and a little extra time to make your way through the bottleneck. There is a benefit to this slow crawl through the commercial core: you can get a good look at some of the interesting buildings and businesses that you pass along the way.

**May 27** – Chestnut trees are now in bloom, with their distinctive towers of cream-coloured flowers. When I see them, it brings to mind paintings by Group of Seven artist Lawren Harris of old Toronto houses, some with chestnuts on the street in front of them. Old houses, old-time trees. There’s one in front of 183 Main Street North, at Parkway Avenue. I’ve also seen some on Sixteenth Avenue, west of the village. These beautiful trees used to be common, but a blight greatly affected them early in the twentieth century. The decimation of the American elm in the 1950s, and more recently, the mass dying of the ash tree are more recent, regrettable losses to our tree diversity that has affected the urban and rural landscape. I wrote this while sitting in the Joseph Street Parkette, another public space created in a stopped-up old street. I believe that Joseph Street and Church Street were closed off at Main when Robinson Street was extended to the east. This was undoubtably a solution to improve local traffic circulation. Buildings were demolished to make way – but which ones? A photograph in *Markham 1793-1900* shows a small brick store with a flat, patterned shingled upper storey in about the right place.<sup>23</sup> Another archival photograph that shows the old post office and the small store to the north is found in *Markham 1900-2000*.<sup>24</sup> There’s a plaque in the parkette that commemorates the completion and opening of the Main Street Markham Revitalization Project, dated June 20, 2014. New sidewalks with brick borders, new lighting to recall the age of gaslight (which ironically Markham Village didn’t have), street trees and other embellishments were added to replace the old public realm infrastructure. This was Main Street Markham catching up with Main Street Unionville, a well-known rivalry that exists in Markham’s political personality.

**May 28** – The day started with light rain, a welcome break in this month’s drought. At around 9:45 a.m. on this cool day, I looked out the kitchen window to see what appeared to be snowflakes falling amongst the raindrops. Going outside to verify what I was observing from indoors, I saw that the big, wet snowflakes melted on contact with the ground. Just after 10:00, the snow intensified, and I heard from a couple of friends

who were concerned about their recently-planted annuals. I thought you were safe with planting on the May 24<sup>th</sup> weekend. The snow stopped about 11:00, and a good, steady rain followed, ideal for refreshing the parched soil. The next day, one of our containers of petunias looked droopy, probably due to the snow.

**May 29** – The Tremont House Hotel, 1873, stands at 123 Main Street North. A hotel has stood on this site since the 1840s. When our family moved to Markham in 1998, at least a few of the storefronts that occupy the front section of the old hotel were still in use. I bought a painted kitchen chair from an antique shop there, which I am only just now in the process of refinishing. That's procrastination. Speaking of procrastination, what do you see when you look at this shuttered building? A derelict structure maintained to a minimum standard under the authority of the municipal Property Standards By-law? That's one way of looking at it. Another way of looking at it is to see an important landmark on Main Street awaiting the time when the right people and the right factors will come together at last to bring this historic, small-town hotel building back to life. It's the last of its kind in the village. What could the Tremont become? Maybe a restaurant with a distinctive Markham flair, with locally-sourced food, accompanied by local craft beers, but with a menu that draws on the rich cultural diversity that defines the city today. Upstairs, there could be space for private functions, or perhaps office space for small enterprises getting their start in an emerging new economy. The present state of this moss-green coloured, board and batten building, said to be the result of a long-standing impasse between the owner and the municipality, is a blight on Main Street's otherwise going-forward character. What will it take to get something going here?

**May 30** – Spring-like weather. A fine day of sunshine and mild temperatures. I saw a sign for a garage sale on Parkway Avenue this week-end. First one I have seen in a while – unusual for these times. Heard part of a conversation while on a walk yesterday. One person said to the other, "I enjoy your constant banter – it's hilarious!" On the news it said that the reason for extra pollen right now is a cooler than usual start to spring.

In the afternoon, I was back in the Church Street Parkette. To me, Markham Village feels more like a small town than a village. Busy Main Street has its brick commercial blocks, two storeys or more in height, with some rows of stores forming a continuous frontage of small-scale commercial establishments. I'm thinking in particular of the west side of Main Street, between Robinson Street and Wilson Street. The length of the commercial strip and the width of the road, in comparison with the neighbouring village of Unionville, feels town-like rather than village-like. The perceived size of Markham Village is enhanced by the flanking residential neighbourhoods that were developed on farms that bordered the old village. The suburbanization of the area began in the 1950s with the Robinson neighbourhood on the south-west side of the village, and continued during the decades to follow. It was only in the 1980s that the former Reesor and Raymer farms immediately west of where we live on Peter Street were built upon. The Markham Village Heritage Conservation District, put in place by Markham Council in

1991, recognizes and preserves the extent of old Markham. The newer areas are easily distinguished from the old by the design of the houses and streets. It's interesting to observe how the first subdivisions in the vicinity of Markham Village are now undergoing transformation as, one by one, the bungalows of the 1950s are being demolished and replaced by custom-built, two-storey houses that have an air of gentrification about them. Stone fronts, European design inspiration, high ceiling heights and puffed-up roof forms typify the infill home of the 2020s.

**May 31** – At the Rouge Park mid-morning, following the trail that leads northward from the crossroads hamlet of Mongolia. Sunny, mild, and still. The woodlots and hedgerows have really filled in with greenery over the last few weeks. There's a magical play of light and shadow in the wooded areas, and what was visible in early spring is now mostly hidden from view, like the old snake-rail farm fence I took note of in late March. There was a great deal of bird activity, especially in the first woodlot along the trail. A boisterous concert of birdsong could be heard among the oaks and maples, but the birds themselves were mostly unseen. In the open areas, I took in expansive views of farm fields, both tilled and lying fallow, painted in shades of green, brown and gold. Big views of the sky and distant horizons. Along the path, in certain places, were horsetail plants, with their distinctive, jointed stems. My grandmother called these "scouring rushes" because she recalled using them to scrub cooking pots clean in her youth in the early 1900s. These unusual plants are a miniature version of the horsetails that grew much larger during the Carboniferous period of prehistoric times. On the same theme, a large, black, basalt boulder sitting in the brush just off an east-west leg of the trail put me in mind of the fossil skull of *Tyrannosaurus rex* on display in the dinosaur gallery of the Royal Ontario Museum.

**June 1** – Getting closer to the beginning of summer. I've learned that the Markham Village Farmers' Market will open this coming Saturday. Last year, they tried an on-line market with curbside pick-up. At the time, people were still getting used to this different way of doing business, so I'm not sure how successful the venture was. So much of what draws people to farmers' markets has to do with the atmosphere of being there.

In the afternoon, I was in the back yard with the dog. Sun and cloud today, with a good breeze and occasional gusts coming in from the south-west, jostling the branches and leaves of the trees with a soft, whispering sound that evokes a care-free, restful feeling. Some rain is forecast for mid-week, which is good. Certain trees and shrubs are showing signs of stress due to the lingering dry spell of May, especially the London plane tree in front of our house. Its foliage is looking a little less dense this year. This is the type of tree that sheds sections of its outer bark to expose the cream and green coloured cambium layers underneath.

The family of robins that have nested on our property have been very active. The young have hatched and are out and about. One baby bird somehow ended up on the seat of

one of our patio chairs, and for a time didn't know what to do. My son James placed a cushion in front of the chair, and in a while the little bird made its way down to the ground, where it was reunited with its parents. I noticed its colouring was somewhat different from that of the adult robins.

**June 2** – In the workshop this morning making parts for an outdoor table. My workshop is a small frame building, 10 feet by 10 feet, with a storage loft. It's modelled after the harness shop at the Markham Museum. We built the workshop in 2018, using much material salvaged from nineteenth century houses that had been demolished. The frame is of new post and beam construction, done by hand, and therefore taking many hours to complete. The wall sheathing, doors, windows, floor and roof boards are all parts of old structures, and each has its own story. For example, the windows on the south side of the building, and the front door, were made in 1864 by William Nathaniel Hastings, a joiner and carpenter from Scarborough Township, who just happened to be my wife's great-great-great grandfather. My workshop looks and feels like an historic structure from the time of Canada's Confederation. Nearby is a young sugar maple tree we planted to commemorate Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of nationhood. Having a shop of this type, on this property, seems appropriate given that the original owner, Abram Sider, was a carpenter. He likely had a workshop here. Many of the tools I use are vintage hand tools gathered from all sorts of places. My workbench vise comes from the MacDonald property in Thornhill. A set of chisels belonged to William N. Hastings. A small desk and a tool caddy are from my own grandfather's shop. My maternal grandfather, William "Bill" Schmid was a skilled pattern maker.

**June 3** – Gentle rainfall overnight. Not a substantial amount, but enough to freshen up the greenery everywhere. Just after breakfast I, walked to Springdale Park to visit the woodlot trail while the morning fog still lingered. With a near absence of outside traffic noise and other walkers, there was a notable stillness in the woods, except for occasional birdsong and the sound of rainwater slowly dripping from the canopy of leaves overhead. I found Robinson Creek and the spring creek flowing with renewed vigor. The odd raindrop disturbed the smooth surface of the spring creek with concentric rings as I paused and watched for a while on the small wooden bridge that crosses the thin stream. The rain-damp ground scented the air with the smell of pine needles that carpet the forest floor, and the cedar mulch of the trail. When I was close to reaching the end of the trail, I heard the melodious sound of a woman singing a tune unfamiliar to me, in another language. The woods were suddenly filled with an atmosphere that is difficult to capture in words. Spiritual, mysterious, beautiful. After a moment or two, an elderly Asian couple slowly walked past me, travelling in the opposite direction. When there was some space between us again, the singing resumed and resounded through the woods until the couple left that place to continue on their way.



**June 4** – Today is the beginning of a heat wave forecast to last several days. It was predicted for the first four days of June by the *Farmer's Almanac*, so it was off by a mere three days. Temperatures in the low 30s (high 80s Fahrenheit).

Markham Village GO Transit's east parking lot is the most recent of the parking facilities that serve this stop. The east lot was added in 2008-2009. This was the site of an old Shell service station and some vacant land. To me, it seemed an odd location for a service station, because traditionally they have occupied corner properties at major intersections. Gas stations are far fewer in number now than what I remember from my youth, when some major intersections had more than one. Now, most oil companies just have gas bars and convenience stores. The former Shell station was not the first on this site – there was an automotive garage established here in the 1920s. In a small seating area in a corner of the GO parking lot, there is a small interpretive plaque that shows the Reesor garage on a fire insurance map dated 1927. The map reveals that the land adjacent to the north side of the railway line was once busy with commercial activity. Alongside the tracks were the grain elevator, feed mill and coal yard of D. E. Jones (who bought our house in 1909), and next door was the Markham Planing Mill. This business, started in 1895 by John Monkhouse, produced dimensional lumber, doors, windows and other wooden components for building. We don't know for certain, but the proximity of the Markham Planing Mill to our property makes it likely that the materials for building our house were supplied from there. I read that the business continued under a series of operators until the 1960s. Today, all of these once vital enterprises are gone; only memories are preserved in archival photographs and on old maps. Right now, the parking lot has only a few cars in it owing to the effect of the pandemic on people commuting to the office. A train went by at 9:35 with six cars rather than the usual 12. I expect this to change by the fall when things generally re-start to something resembling the pre-pandemic state of things. By then, the parking lot will likely be busy once again.

**June 5** – Opening day for the Markham Village Farmers' Market. The market is open from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. This year the location has moved to the parking lot next to the Old Town Hall, which allows Robinson Street to remain open. The day was sunny and quite warm, with a decent breeze cooling things off a bit, but ruffling the sun shades over the booths and playing havoc with signs and papers. The market is a wonderful community amenity that has been in the village for a while now, operating from at least the early 2000s. The market creates a centre of colourful activity that you can't miss when passing by in a vehicle or on foot. Market day is a social event combining friendly commerce and conversation. Not at all like on-line shopping. I always see a friend or neighbour at or near the market when I visit. There was a good number of vendors today: one with vegetables, two bakers, a person that makes soup and scone mixes, a brewery, and others selling what I call healthy lifestyle products. Next to the entrance was a snack bar, which I didn't get a chance to check out this time, but will do so on my next visit.

**June 6** – A day hot like mid-summer. Our peonies are coming into bloom, not all at once, but one-by-one according to the amount of sunlight they receive in the places where they grow. On our property are some long-established peonies that were planted by former owners. These ones have the large, ball-shaped double blooms that are commonly seen in today's gardens: pink, white, red and magenta. Because of my interest in historic gardens, we have introduced some stunning examples of older varieties of peonies that have simpler, single blooms and prominent yellow centres. To me, these old-fashioned flowers are more beautiful and exotic for their simplicity. In the book, *At Home in Upper Canada*, author Jeanne Minhinnick wrote of old-time dooryard gardens:

"The great days of these gardens, however, were the twelve days of peony bloom. (They were called "pinys" then and the country people still call them so.)" <sup>25</sup>

"It seems strange that many popular flowers of the early days, flowers which are both hardy and lovely, are now almost forgotten by most flower growers. The old single peony is not generally grown now." <sup>26</sup>

**June 7** – Thinking about my weekend visit to the Markham Village Farmers' Market, the variety of products offered at small local markets like ours makes a noteworthy statement about the steady decline in the agricultural base in the community. Fewer family farms means fewer vendors of farm produce. Forsythe Family Farm has been a mainstay of the Markham Village Farmers' Market, and also supported the Stiver Mill Farmers' Market in Unionville. They used to be based on Kennedy Road but were compelled to move out to Greenbank when a new owner of their leased land decided to be free of tenants. I would say that you need to have at least one decent-sized booth selling fresh produce to keep a farmers' market worthy of the name. In Markham, as in other growing areas of the region, large tracts of land are being developed into new urban neighbourhoods, and much of the remaining agricultural land is under cultivation by croppers that lease land from holding companies and developers. Farming as both a way of life and a vocation has changed significantly. The family farm is becoming part of our nostalgic past, like the little red schoolhouse. I take my hat off to the farmers that take the time and trouble to participate in these markets, and to the organizers who reach out to the farming community to help keep the tradition of the local farmers' market alive.

In the late afternoon, I saw a monarch butterfly in the wetlands area of Cedar Valley Park. With declining numbers due to habitat loss, the sighting of a monarch butterfly has become uncommon and noteworthy. My son, James, saw one in our yard the other day and mentioned it to me. We are growing a couple of butterfly milkweed plants in a garden planter to help them along.

**June 8** – It rained overnight, and a light rain continued to fall in the first part of the morning. Still more rainfall is needed for the land to bounce back from the drought.

Fred Robbins said it rained again in Stouffville in the late afternoon, but none of that reached here.

I spoke to Lorne Smith in the evening to see what he knew of the extent of family-run farms remaining in Markham. He mentioned a few examples of farms where they sell produce from a stand at the road rather than having a booth at a farmers' market. The Reesor market on Ninth Line was an example. They lease their land from Parks Canada. Some of the other old Markham families like Lewis, Pearse, Yake and Brillinger continue to farm, though some have sold their land and are leasing. Other local farming families are cropping land slated for future development. Lorne noted that the sons of Murray Reesor have the last dairy herd in Markham on their farm on Steeles Avenue, Cedar Grove. Dairy farms were once very prominent in this area so to hear that this is the last one really underscores the feeling of a transition from the old ways that formerly defined the community. I remarked to Lorne that in his lifetime he has seen the transformation of a primarily rural, agricultural community into a steadily-growing urban one, and he spoke about how development has now come to the western boundary of the land he lives on, a remnant of his parents' farm, and that development is now approaching from the south as the former Brown family farm has been stripped of much of its topsoil in preparation for grading and servicing.

**June 9** – Mostly sunny and quite warm, but without too heavy a feeling of humidity. A small breeze was blowing from the south. The risk of thunderstorms forecast for later in the afternoon, but focused on the south-west so little chance of rain here. Summer-like heat, summer-like dryness. Roadwork signs and orange cones have been appearing on many roadways, but so far little actual work has started. Sixteenth Avenue is about to be worked on as development to the north is getting underway. Nothing planned for Main Street right now, but since roadways are all connected what happens in one place will have an impact elsewhere.

**June 10** – Early in the morning, there was an annular eclipse of the sun, which occurs when the moon gets into a position between the Earth and the Sun. The dark disk of the moon appears smaller in size than the sun as it moves across its face. This creates the effect of a bright ring around the moon. I did not see it, but my wife Linda unintentionally caught a glimpse of the eclipse, which hurt her eyes somewhat. I believe that in ancient times people witnessing celestial phenomenon of this type attributed some kind of significance to it, an omen of something either good or bad.

A return to more moderate temperatures today. I gave the gardens and shrubs a good watering after breakfast.

**June 11** – Fred Robbins called to ask about what I thought defined Georgian architecture as applied to historical buildings in our area. I told him I like to use the term "Georgian architectural tradition" to describe houses with simple, rectangular plans, a general sense of balance and order, minimal decoration except perhaps at the

front entrance, and window shapes based on the double square. This is the term I encountered early on in my studies into early Ontario architecture. Georgian, like Victorian, is really a time period rather than a style, although often the term is very often used as the name for this early mode of building design. The reign of the four King Georges spanned the years 1714 to 1830. On this basis, we only have a few buildings that can truly be called Georgian, but the tradition of building in this somewhat formal, conservative way carried on for many years after 1830, and provided the basic formula for later styles that came into fashion, such as the neo-classic. What is commonly called the Georgian style started in Britain as a reinvention of the work of Italian architect Andrea Palladio, who was inspired in the 1500s by the remnants of ancient Roman buildings. Neo-Palladianism, to use the more architecturally correct term, came to the American colonies and reached Canada with the Loyalists and later British immigrants. What we have here is a vernacular, scaled-down version of what had evolved into quite a sophisticated style in Britain and the U.S.

Probably the best local example of a Georgian tradition residence was Braeside, the home of Peter Milne, constructed by George Wilson in 1835.<sup>27</sup> Sad to say, this fine old house was demolished by the conservation authority after they acquired the former mill site in the Rouge River valley. In the heart of Markham Village, we still have a two-storey red brick building at 61 Main Street North, commonly known as the Terrance McKenna House. It dates from c.1840 and may have been designed as a pair of shops with residential quarters for the shop-keepers and their families. The latest research suggests that the original owner was James Osborne, a moulder at the Mather foundry. McKenna, an early school teacher in the village, seems to have been a tenant here for a time, rather than an owner. This rather dignified structure looks like it was built for rental income rather than a dwelling for the Osborne family. The extra-large ground floor front windows are the clue that suggests the idea of a combined commercial and residential use. The brickwork is very well done, and the character of this early building has been well-preserved.

**June 12** – This morning, while visiting Springdale Park, a fellow early walker commented on the walking stick that I carry when passing through wild and wooded areas. It makes me feel like a true saunterer in the spirit of Henry David Thoreau in his essay, *Walking*. I made this walking stick in the mid-1980s from a carefully-selected maple sapling, cut in a wooded area west of the Sharon Temple historic site. The curve at the top end is perfectly suited to fit my grasp – something that I took the time to get just right. I stripped off the bark then finished the natural walking stick with several coats of linseed oil, a surface that is still sticky in some places after over 30 years.

On my way home, I spoke to Ken Rudy on his porch as I walked through the townhouse complex on Marmill Way. He was telling me that the stout timbers from the 1929 Reesor Marmill that form a trio of decorative arches in the community's central park are quite rotted now. They need to be replaced, but it will be difficult to find new material to match the old. I remember the Marmill Feeds building next to the railway

tracks. It was a large, brick, industrial structure opposite the train station. In the mid-1990s, after the business closed, the building was demolished and an enclave of Neo-Traditional townhouses took its place. The arches in the park were made from material salvaged from the mill. An old weigh scale was also saved and placed in the same area.

**June 13** – Linda and I saw a white-tailed deer at Springdale Park at around 10:30 this morning. It was down a lane not often travelled by people as it is off the main trail. At first, we saw it at a distance, then it slowly came toward us as it looked for something to eat in the foliage next to the lane. When the young deer got somewhat close, we decided to move on to let it go about its business. Rain in the late afternoon.

**June 14** – More rain in the morning. A cooling trend for the week. Celebrating 30 years of marriage with my wife, Linda. Morgan Park Pool opened today. The refurbishment of the pool, and construction of the new building that contains an office, change rooms and washrooms were completed during the pandemic. The building's design fits better with the heritage district than the old one. The 2020 building was modelled somewhat after the historic Markham Village train station. Morgan Park was the first park in Markham Village. It was established on a portion of the Robinson Farm in 1923. The land was purchased by the village council of the day using funds endowed by Thomas and George Morgan, local blacksmiths and manufacturers of farm implements. In 1957, the Markham-Unionville Lions Club coordinated a fundraising campaign to build a pool for the community. They were assisted by other groups in creating this important amenity for the Markham Village as post-war development was bringing new families into the area.<sup>28</sup> By the 2000s, the facilities were in need of updating and the City took on the project of constructing a new changeroom building and renovating, rather than replacing the existing pool. One feature of the new building is an art piece in the lobby that commemorates the rose garden once located here, an ornament of the village from the early 1920s to the mid-1950s. Unfortunately, real roses could not be planted in the landscaping surrounding the pool complex due to modern-day cautiousness about the hazards that the legendary prickly thorns of the rose pose to gardeners and visitors. The mosaic, commissioned and funded by the Markham Village Conservancy, is a beautiful, alternative way of representing the rose garden history here, as well as the history and stories of local families. It was created under the direction of Linda McIntosh, and represents the collaborative effort of the Markham Group of Artists who worked under the challenges posed by the pandemic to contribute this important piece of public art.

**June 15** – Fair and very breezy. Right next door to Morgan Park are the greens of the Markham Village Lawn Bowling Club. The organization can trace its roots back to 1909, so the club pre-dates the establishment of Morgan Park. Looking at the closely-cropped greens from the street, it is difficult to tell if the turf is natural or artificial. A few thin patches and some lines that seem to trace the route of a mower suggest it is the real thing - vibrant and green despite the persistent late-spring drought. No bowlers were around today, but the adjacent tennis courts were busy. From working at the city, I

know there is a lingering question about whether the clubhouse should be renovated or replaced. A portion of the building is older than the club itself, and is reputed to have once been the village Temperance Hall. You can distinguish the earliest part of the structure from its many additions and improvements by its higher roofline. The original site of the clubhouse, and perhaps the Temperance Hall itself, was to the west, on the George Street frontage of the property. Based on the fire insurance map for the neighbourhood, the building was moved to Franklin Street from its original location some time after 1927. Inside the clubhouse is an historical display that has a photograph of the Eckardt Trophy, an award donated by A. J. H. Eckardt, a son of William Eckardt of Unionville. The trophy now resides within the collection of the Markham Museum. Janet Reid, the curator, says that there are papers hidden inside the trophy that refer to the Eckardt family's place in Markham's history, including the role that some family members played in the Upper Canadian Rebellion of 1837. The question remains, is the lawn bowling clubhouse of sufficient historical value to retain? Difficult to say. And how long will the genteel pastime of lawn bowling continue?

**June 16** – Recovering from my second COVID-19 vaccination. I have noticed, as the process of vaccinating a wider range of people is accelerating, a greater degree of activity everywhere. More traffic, more people on the streets, and formerly mothballed restaurant patios have now come back to life with people, food, drink and conversation. It is finally possible to take a much more positive view of the fading out of the pandemic than it was only a couple of months ago when the case numbers were high, and rising, and there was disturbing information on the news about quickly-spreading variants.

**June 17** – On my way home from the vicinity of the lawn bowling green the other day, I noticed that banners had been put up on Main Street to recognize “Markham 50 Years.” This is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Markham in its current form, which came about in 1971 with the creation of the Region of York. At that time, another historic event happened: Markham Village, which was incorporated in 1872, ceased to exist as an independent entity, and was merged into the new Town of Markham along with Unionville, half of Thornhill and Milliken. Long before that, of course, Markham Township had been incorporated in 1850, and before that, it was a township within the Home District of Upper Canada. Now our municipality is a city that has celebrated a number of anniversaries of milestones in the community's development.

**June 18** – Low rumbles of thunder heard after dawn, followed by alternating incidences of light and heavy rain. At a point where the rain tapered off, I decided to venture out with my umbrella, as I was interested in taking a closer look at the individual Markham 50 Years banners, which showcase a variety of noteworthy people and landmarks. The City's website says the banners were co-designed by students of Unionville High School. The banners cover city-wide themes and are also found in other “Main Street” areas of the municipality. In Markham Village, they are mounted on light standards within the Central Business District (CBD), a term I recall learning about at some point

in my education years ago – maybe high school geography class. Here is a list of all of the banners I saw this morning, proudly on display on the Main Street of Markham Village, arranged by theme:

#### Historical Figures

William Markham, Archbishop of York, Markham's namesake  
William Berczy, leader of the Berczy Settlers  
Benjamin Thorne, founder of Thornhill

#### Prominent Residents of Markham Village

Alma Walker, Markham's first mayor  
John Webster, Markham's official town crier

#### Provincial Politics

Mary Anne Chambers, MPP and cabinet minister

#### Media and Performing Arts

Lloyd Robertson, Canada's most trusted news anchor  
Jully Black, award-winning performer

#### Landmarks

Markham Village Train Station  
Veterans Square and Cenotaph, Markham Village  
Stiver Mill and Unionville Train Station  
Angus Glen Community Centre and Library  
Aaniin Community Centre  
Main Street Unionville  
Heintzman House

#### Award-Winning Athletes (Olympics, Commonwealth Games, Pan-Am Games and more)

Bill Crothers – track and field  
Michelle Li – badminton  
Andre De Grasse – sprinter  
Phylicia George – track and field  
Steven Stamkos – ice hockey

**June 19** – A mid-summer day near the last day of spring. In the afternoon, a few dark, threatening clouds suggested possible rain. Much talk among the neighbours concerning a number of recent sightings and encounters with coyotes. At least one member of a coyote family that has established a den in the dense brush of the Mount Joy Creek valleylands has ventured into our neighbourhood, in search of food I presume. A good-sized animal has found its way to David Street and the mid-section of Peter Street. So far, no sightings as far south as our house. One neighbour up the street

said yesterday that he thought the coyotes were after small prey like mice and voles, and probably wouldn't bother with dogs and cats. I'm not so sure. Last night, I heard about a coyote approaching a small dog on the street, even with its owner present. Thinking back to May 25, I am now doubly sure that my Beech Street neighbour did not see a wolf on the trail beside Mount Joy Creek as he thought. In her most recent newsletter, Councillor Karen Rea wrote that by law coyotes cannot be relocated from the general area where they are found, so people have to be mindful of their presence and adjust their behavior for the protection of family pets and themselves. It's all about avoidance and awareness.

**June 20 – Father's Day.** The final day of spring is feeling very summer-like. Perfect barbeque weather for Father's Day.

## Summer 2021

**June 21 – The Summer Solstice.** The longest day of the year. As I write this, I cannot help but picture Stonehenge in my mind's eye, thinking of all of the archaeology-based programmes that talk about how ancient monuments were aligned so that one time each year, sunlight falls in a particular way to illuminate a significant feature. Rain overnight and into the morning. Not a significant amount of rainfall, but at least enough to help the landscape to green up. Transplanted plants have been struggling, even with being watered two to three times on the many hot, sunny dry days. Hoping most of my zinnias will make it. I will try to buy some plants to fill in blank spots if not.

This is National Indigenous Peoples Day. In Markham, the name of the Aaniin Community Centre is perhaps the City's most prominent expression of Indigenous culture. The word "aaniin" in the Ojibwe language translates to "hello" or "welcome" in English. Quoting from the City of Markham's website:

"The name was chosen to welcome Markham's many diverse communities, to celebrate Canada 150, and in honour of our First Nations peoples."

**June 22 –** A cool day for late in June. A mid-September feeling in the air. This afternoon, I was on Captain Armstrong's Lane in a neighbourhood a little to the east of old Markham Village. At the western end of the street, standing apart from its modern-era suburban neighbours both physically and in time, stands an old storey-and-a-half farmhouse of solid-looking fieldstone construction – Ash Grove Farm.<sup>1</sup> It is an historical building not well-known due to its secluded location – an unexpected remnant of a vanished agricultural landscape. The Armstrong House stands behind a pair of stone gateposts and towering black walnut trees on a remnant of what was once a large farm property of 195 acres when it was purchased by William Goodfellow Armstrong in 1823. It has hardly changed since its last renovation in the early 1900s, when an Edwardian Classical verandah was added to the Georgian tradition front of the mid-nineteenth century dwelling. When the leaves have fallen and the wild area that



stands between this property and Highway 7 is more open, people may get a glimpse of the Armstrong House through the trees as they drive by. It is a remarkable fact that this property remains in the ownership of a descendant of William Armstrong, an English immigrant that married into the prominent Pennsylvania-German Reesor family.

William Armstrong married Esther Reesor in 1833. Armstrong built a large, two-storey frame hotel in 1836, at the north-west corner of what eventually became known as Main Street and Highway 7. The building looked much like the Half Way House at Black Creek Pioneer Village, with a two-level verandah across its façade. For a time, the local Armstrong distillery supplied the barroom with whisky, until “big whisky” put an end to that. The family lived in the hotel until they moved into this stone farmhouse built for them in 1853. Their new house was far-removed from the hotel and the growing village. Known as Captain William Armstrong due to his role in organizing the local militia, this important early resident of Markham also contributed to his community by hosting the Markham Fair on the western portion of his property for many years.

**June 23** - Yesterday, I was speaking with Lorne Smith about stone houses in Markham, and how they were typically built in farm settings rather than in our local villages, and how they were more numerous on the east side of Markham, within the Rouge watershed. We were talking about how farming families, as they became more established on their land, would build a substantial, permanent home after passing through the settlement stages of shanty, log cabin, and frame house. The finest type of farmhouse to aspire to in this area was one of stone, perhaps a reminder of the buildings these families or their ancestors had known in the United States, Europe and Britain. Lorne commented that a farmer would build with the intention that the house and farm would pass to one of his sons, and so on through the generations. The builders of these well-constructed dwellings could not have imagined the social, economic, political and technological changes that would work to disperse the children of old families, often far from their home ground. There was an expectation that this way of life would continue, so they built with that view in mind. The Armstrong farmhouse that I visited yesterday, still, owned by an Armstrong, is a noteworthy exception to the pattern played out so many times on farms throughout Markham and the province as a whole.

**June 24** - A warm day, but made to feel cooler with gusty winds from the south. I passed by the Lynde Institute for Dermatology at 25 Main Street North today. Dr. Lynde is internationally known in his field and the main office, one of several facilities in this part of Markham Village connected with the Institute, is marked with a large bronze plaque presented by Mayor Scarpitti on the occasion of its opening in 2014. In its original role, this building served as the local post office from 1956 to 2013. It is a simple, red brick, single-storey modernist building of its time, with some recent enhancements to its main entrance. This former post office replaced a 1910 building of grander design that stood where Scotiabank is today, at 101 Main Street North. Before the 1956 post office was built, the property was a neat, linear, open space that connected the old Presbyterian Church on Washington Street with Main Street. Old photographs show a well-kept lawn, an ornamental garden, and a pair of trim concrete sidewalks.

This plot of land not only provided access to the church, but visually linked it to the activity of the main street of the village.

**June 25** – Clouds in the sky today, with potential for rain in the evening. Rain would be welcome, since the drought at this point has lasted about two months. Trees are stressed with the effects of the drought, but also troubled by an infestation of gypsy moth caterpillars. Our neighbourhood, so far, has not had too many caterpillars, but the area to the north of Milne Park has many trees almost stripped of leaves.

On the east side of Washington Street, just south of the Markham Veterans Association Hall, there is a flat-roofed building that started its life as a bowling alley in 1965. The bowling alley was built while the land was still part of the Markham Veteran's Association property. Later on, it was sold and housed a number of restaurants, the last and most popular of them being Johnny Bistro, which was there until the 2010s. Now it is part of the Lynde Institute for Dermatology and the building has been updated with new wood siding. Long before the bowling alley was constructed, the property at 5 Washington Street was the site of an early Common School, which used to be marked with a large, old black walnut tree according to *Markham 1793-1900*.<sup>2</sup> In an official report dated 1834, Terrance McKenna was the teacher at that time. The schoolhouse is shown on the plan of Markham Village, 1850. By the mid-1850s, the school location had moved north, to Franklin Street. This seems like a good place for a future interpretive plaque to mark where the first school in Markham Village once stood. When there is no building remaining to express the history of an important place, I call that "hidden history." With the walnut tree long gone too, this is a good example of that.

**June 26** – A good rain fell overnight, following another steady rain event in the afternoon of the previous day. This was enough rainfall to give the parched earth a proper soaking. Today was humid, cloudy and breezy. It was an ideal day for planting some flowering native plants my son James had ordered from a specialized supplier. We completed an enclosure to protect the young plants from the rabbits and possibly other animals that have tended to disturb some of our other recent plantings. Here is what was planted:

Purple Coneflower	Yellow Coneflower	New England Aster
Wild Columbine	Butterfly Milkweed	Common Milkweed
Canada Anemone	Goldenrod	Blue Vervain
Smooth Oxeye	Blue Lobelia	

The idea is to attract beneficial insects and contribute to biodiversity on our property. Despite our efforts to protect the new plants in both enclosed gardens in our yard, it was not long before a squirrel was digging around another recently planted goldenrod plant, nearly pulling it out of the ground. I have no idea what a squirrel would want with goldenrod – I don't believe it is a food source for them. In the late afternoon, a rabbit found its way to the new enclosure and appeared to be inspecting the fence for

weaknesses. This rabbit is one of a family that have been gnawing away at the bark of two of the serviceberry shrubs we planted a couple of months ago. The result: a garden visually cluttered with make-shift plant enclosures that are unsightly, but mostly effective so far.

In the early evening I walked through Cedar Valley Park and sat for a while on a bench overlooking the wetland. I noticed that the trail was especially busy, with people of diverse cultures and ages enjoying a pleasant evening walk through this natural area. It struck me how an appreciation of nature, and the joy of walking through places that have an element of wildness about them, is something that people have in common, contributing to a feeling of kinship between different people as they greet one another along the path.

**June 27** – Cottony clouds and patches of light blue filled the sky for most of the day. Hot and humid, but with a gusty breeze from the south-west that made it pleasant to be outside. Many people were out walking in the morning to get their walks in before the temperature climbed to the forecast high of 32 degrees.

Last week, I had planned to write about the former site of the Markham Fairgrounds, but got distracted by the story of Markham's last post office building instead. Today I will re-visit the continuation of last Thursday's walk through the village. There are so many things connected with the old fairgrounds that I could fill many pages. This time, I will focus on Veterans Square. In the foreground of the Markham Village Library is the old Cenotaph, a double colonnade of concrete and stone that is aligned with a pathway that connects to Highway 7. There used to be an arched portal leading into the site that echoed the post-modern architecture of the 1980s library. In 2018, the city erected a new monument to further recognize the contribution of our veterans, placing it closer to the street corner. The new monument, in grey granite, is obelisk-shaped and discretely decorated with a bronze wreath of oak leaves and a ring of maple leaves in the pavement around it. The monument has a quiet dignity and an imposing presence at this significant location. This enhancement of Veterans Square was done to commemorate the 150 years of Canada's Confederation, which occurred in 2017. The dedication of the monument took place on June 9, 2018. The names of local veterans are found nearby, at the Markham Veterans Association building at 7 Washington Street. More names may be seen on plaques at the Markham Civic Centre, at the cenotaph in Unionville in front of the Crosby Memorial Community Centre, and in Thornhill.

Adjoining Veterans Square is an amphitheater-shaped area and a bronze sculpture on a black marble base that is a tribute to Markham's firefighters who died in the line of duty. The Firefighters' Memorial was completed in 2021. In addition to the firefighter's helmet, boots and coat placed atop the marble base facing the amphitheater, there are five bronze helmets spaced along one level of amphitheater seating to represent the five people commemorated here: Paul Donahoe, Larry Pilkey, Albert Hollands, Jason

Churchill and Lorne Martin. I wonder if the artist who created the design envisioned that when a service is held here, present-day firefighters would symbolically share the space with their fallen colleagues, through the presence of the helmets on the bench beside them.

**June 28** – Above-seasonal temperatures again. This day felt warmer than yesterday, with fewer clouds decorating the hot sky, and less of a breeze blowing. I stayed close to home this afternoon, thinking about how the heritage district helps to maintain the things that make Markham Village distinctive in the midst of the ever-growing urban neighbourhoods of the city. The heritage district is covered by a set of objectives, policies and guidelines designed to ensure that when changes happen (as they will), they do not detract from the essential characteristics that define the village as a community with a long history. Here in Ontario, it seems we need to legislate and regulate what happens in places that are fortunate enough to have retained a good measure of their picturesque beauty from the time before the automobile changed the face of the landscape so drastically. In places that do not have the safeguards offered by a heritage district, changes happen quickly that leave irreparable scars – demolition of historical landmarks, or their disfigurement through insensitive renovations often done as a quick fix and with a short-term view in mind. In my travels through towns and villages in the New England states, I have been struck by how many of these centuries-old communities seem to preserve their sense of place and classic New England qualities through what appears to be a common appreciation and understanding among property owners. Of course, there are exceptions, but countless New England communities have a picture-postcard look about them. I wish it was more like that here, but a common feeling of value in the built environment is not generally prevalent as it is there. That's why the heritage conservation district in Markham Village is so important.

**June 29** – On the news this morning it was reported that yesterday, the temperature reached 47.9 degrees Celsius in Lytton, British Columbia, the highest ever recorded in Canada on any day. That's just over 118 Fahrenheit in the system I grew up with, which makes it seem all the hotter. In Markham, it was also quite hot, 32 degrees by the afternoon, just shy of 90 degrees Fahrenheit. I learned today from the news channel weather experts that those temperatures are measured in the shade, with the temperature in the direct sun being more intense. Thunderstorms in the late afternoon, into the early evening, none too severe, but a great deal of rain fell.

P.S. On July 1, the temperature at Lytton, B.C. reached a new historical record of 49.6 degrees Celsius, or 121.28 degrees Fahrenheit. On that day, it was reported that 90% of the village of Lytton had been destroyed by a wildfire. The result of climate change?

**June 30** – I'm sitting on one of the two metal benches at the Dorothea Moss Garden on a cloudy, humid day following yesterday's rain. White roses in the garden are in full bloom. From my vantage point I can see the railway crossing on Main Street, but not the

Markham Village Train Station, which I know is on my right some distance away. In my mind's eye, I imagine a steam engine departing from the station, pulling its coaches and cars behind, and sounding its whistle as it approaches the roadway, leaving a thick plume of black smoke behind. I can almost see the muscular elegance of the Victorian machinery of the old narrow-gauge engine of the Toronto and Nipissing Railway as it passed by on its first working run between Scarborough and Uxbridge. That was Dominion Day, July 1, 1871, not long after Confederation.<sup>3</sup> That's 150 years ago this year. What an occasion that must have been in our village. Surely most of the local residents must have waited by the new railway line for a glimpse of this wonder of technology and harbinger of progress for Markham Village and the new Dominion of Canada!

**July 1 – Canada Day.** Today, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau addressed the nation in a message “asking that people celebrating Canada Day make time to reflect on the nation's historical failures and commit to building a more fair and equitable society.” This was in light of the recent tragic discoveries of hundreds of unmarked graves at the sites of three former residential schools in Western Canada, discoveries that have amplified the country's understanding of the true impact of the residential school system upon our Indigenous peoples.

In the evening, the sound of firecrackers and other fireworks began at dusk, about 9:30 p.m. A large community display of fireworks was held, probably informally, at the GO Station parking lot. It didn't get quiet until around midnight but one of my sons said he saw quite a show from his bedroom window.

**July 2 –** A cool and cloudy beginning to the day. I walked past the train station and down St. Goran Crescent to see what I could see of the white house nestled in the trees on the opposite side of the tracks. This is an old house, as can be discerned by its general shape, frame construction and style of windows. From this side of the tracks, it's difficult to figure out exactly how this house fits into the neighbourhood, until you learn that it is located on the south side of Station Street, house number 15. This is a large, well-treed property that once belonged to the railway. In fact, the house was built to serve as the residence of the section foreman by the Toronto and Nipissing Railway in the 1870s. It's as old as, or almost as old as, the train station itself, which was built in 1870. Curiously, the house lacks a front door, but there is a tell-tale space between the two front windows that suggests that an old door has been covered up in later renovations, and may yet exist under the modern aluminum siding. On the east side of the house is a huge, old maple tree that I have only recently noticed. It looks like a tree from a story-book, with a thick, lumpy trunk and heavy branches. When the leaves have fallen from the trees and shrubs in winter, this house can be seen from Bullock Drive.

I spotted a “fairy ring” of tiny, greyish-brown mushrooms on my way home, not deep in a woodlot as one would expect, but on the small front lawn of a townhouse on

Marmill Way. Some believe these to be mystical places. In European folklore, they are said to be places where elves, pixies and fairies dance and play. Mortal beings are warned against disturbing them, which according to very old folk beliefs, could be a dangerous mistake. Science explains them as a naturally-occurring phenomenon of the fungal, rather than the magical realm.

**July 3** – There's a number of lawn signs in the neighbourhood to congratulate elementary school and high school graduates, as in-person graduation ceremonies were not possible again this year due to the pandemic. It's nice to see that the students' efforts are being recognized in this public way, and when you see a sign at a house you know someone who lives there is now a graduate. Some signs have a space for the student's name to be written in, some don't, but they all identify the name of the school.

Last evening, we took the dog out for a walk around 8:30 p.m., and when passing by the home of Andre, one of our Peter Street neighbours, we saw two bright yellow blooms of evening primrose open up in his garden. These flowers bloom at around 9:00 p.m. and by morning, they close up again and are done. They have a vibrant yellow colour that is very eye-catching. Andre is very proud of his evening primroses and has gone to great lengths to protect them from the rabbits that love to feed on the tender plants by enclosing the area with chicken wire. He said one year he counted 60 blooms.

I received messages from my former Markham heritage colleagues that Marion Matthias had passed away early on July 2. Marion, a resident of historic Colborne Street since the 1970s, was a well-known advocate for the preservation of old Thornhill and the heritage buildings of Markham. She attended countless Town and City Council and Development Services Committee meetings, and seldom missed a meeting of Heritage Markham, the municipal heritage committee. She was not afraid to speak her mind, and was famous for her directness. She was a proud Canadian and a passionate supporter of heritage conservation. Marion Matthias was the person who successfully nominated Markham for Heritage Canada's first-ever Prince of Wales Prize for Heritage Conservation in the year 2000. I hope that the Society for the Preservation of Historic Thornhill finds a way to recognize her contribution to the community, perhaps with a tree planting, plaque, or something else that will ensure her name lives on in historic Thornhill.

**July 19** – Back to writing after a two-week break. While the spring and early summer were uncommonly dry, these past two weeks have been full of rainstorms. Lawns and gardens everywhere in the village that were looking droopy and tired have become lush and green. Our zinnias in the front garden bed, which had been struggling to survive even with twice-daily watering, are now in bloom. Pink, red, yellow and orange flowers so far. When the zinnias are all in bloom as a mass planting, we say it's the "coral reef" of our garden.

On Friday last week the province moved into Stage 3 of re-opening relating to the pandemic. This meant that some restrictions affecting businesses have been scaled back to allow some that have been closed to open, and some already open to allow a greater degree of access. People are weary of the restrictions, even though most accept that they have been necessary to control the spread of COVID-19. With a greater number of people now having two doses of the vaccine, it feels safer, even though mask-wearing and social distancing are still required. The custom has been in place for so long now it no longer seems strange – at least, not to me.

**July 20** – While reading up on Canadian writers of the 1880s and 1890s, I happened upon a reference to an old book that appears to be based on the notorious Markham Gang that were a menace in this area in the 1840s. The story of this gang of forgers and thieves has somehow been left out of mainstream history books on Markham Township, and may only be encountered in articles and in the excellent book, *From Mayhem to Murder: The History of the Markham Gang* by Paul Arculus, published in 2003. No doubt citizens, business owners and local farmers around Markham Village were aware of the gang's activities, and may have been victims of their crimes, or perhaps even participants in them. Members of the Markham Gang were supposed to have been the sons of respectable farmers and land owners. The mayhem of the Markham Gang was a continuation of the political and social unrest centred around the Upper Canadian Rebellion of 1837. I learned that there was a novel published in 1886 called *Four Canadian Highwaymen; or The Robbers of Markham Swamp*. The author was Joseph Edmund Collins. I wonder if anyone in Markham has a copy. This was not a factual account of the Markham Gang or its specific members, but a fictionalized story based on real events, as they say in the movie industry. I'd like to see a copy.

Today there is an air quality advisory due to smoke in the air drifting our way from wildfires in northwestern Ontario, and maybe as far away as the interior of British Columbia. Yesterday's red-coloured sunset was beautiful to look at, but an indication of the devastation of large tracts of forest and communities that has been the result of exceptionally hot temperatures and dry conditions in certain parts of Canada and the American West. I could not detect any distinct haze or smokey smell in the air.

**July 25** – This afternoon I attended via Zoom (internet meeting), the board meeting of the York Pioneer and Historical Society. I was elected to the board earlier this year. This organization, founded in 1869, is Ontario's oldest historical society. Several early residents of Markham Township were members, and some were residents of Markham Village. Joseph Wales, a carriage maker, is one that I know of. The York Pioneers are best known for the preservation of the Scadding Cabin in 1879, when it was moved to what is now known as Exhibition Place. They also saved the temple of the Children of Peace at Sharon in 1919, a unique piece of religious architecture with a fascinating history. Today, their primary activity is promoting the history of Toronto and its surrounding communities through the publication of a yearly journal called *The York Pioneer*, the

erection of plaques, and by opening the Scadding Cabin Museum of early Toronto artifacts to visitors at selected times.

**July 26** – Joseph Wales lived in a modest frame house on the west side of George Street, number 14.<sup>4</sup> This house is unusual in Markham Village for its gable-fronted, one-storey design. It dates from *circa* 1866 and was likely built by Mr. Wales himself, a skilled carpenter and carriage-maker. I drove by the other day and saw that its board and batten siding, formerly painted white, has been painted in a dark charcoal grey that is in style right now, and has been for several years. Joseph Wales was the younger brother of Henry R. Wales, a prominent local carriage maker who operated the Phoenix Carriage Works. Henry was the best-known and most prosperous of the family – his house at 159 Main Street North is evidence of his success. For a time, Joseph Wales lived in Erie County, New York, then returned to Markham to work in his brother's factory for a while. Next, Joseph felt the allure of California, where he lived for three years before again returning to Markham to work in the family business. More research is needed to determine during which years he was a member of the York Pioneers, but he must have had an interest in history that led him to join the organization. Wales Avenue, in Mount Joy, is named after Joseph Wales because he once owned a tract of land that was subdivided in the early 1900s. The subdivider, D. E. Jones, decided to honour the former owner of the land by naming the new street after him.

**July 27** – A mostly cloudy day with a good, heavy rain around noon. There are still air quality warnings due to smoke migrating from wildfires in northwestern Ontario. I have not been outside much this week so I haven't noticed anything in the air. We are in the midst of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Enthusiasm for the games is increasing as events are being held and medals are won, but at the same time cases of COVID-19 in Japan have increased to a level of concern.

**July 28** – A fine summer day with sun and warmth and only a hint of humidity. We've really been fortunate lately, with a stretch of pleasant weather punctuated with enough rain to maintain a beautiful abundance of vigorous plant growth. Gardens in the village are overflowing with blooms and are prospering in a way we usually don't see at this time of the summer, which has been typically very hot and dry in previous years.

Today I find myself in the world of imagination – imagining Markham Village in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when our community was the industrial heart of old Markham Township. A good collection of archival photographs, many of them in the form of postcards, provides excellent pictorial representations of the village at that time. Most of the views are of Main Street. A few of the post cards had colour added as an enhancement and are particularly attractive, transforming the usual black and white images we see from the past into something closer to reality. The Markham Museum's archival collection allows us to see Markham Village as a rural village, before the advent of modern times transformed it into what it is today, a place that is both old and new, combining elements that reflect nearly 200 years of the community's development. As



valuable as these old photographs are, they don't tell the whole story. I wonder about what Markham Village would have sounded like on a mid-summer day like this one, as you walked along Main Street. Think of the busy Speight Wagon Works, the Morgan blacksmith shop, the livery stable, the foundries and other industries with the sound of work going on in each of those places. On a summer morning, with all of this activity going on, the air would have been filled with the drone of the steam-powered saws, the bang-banging of the blacksmith's heavy hammer, the light hammering as carriages were assembled – so many sounds of a mix of industries large and small, intermingled with the chatter of the workmen as they went about their tasks – practical talk, idle chit-chat, politics, and the rougher kind of conversation of men at work (as I am writing this, I am aware that I am only speaking of men, which is historically accurate for the types of workplaces of the industrial class during this time period). The women of the village, while the men were in their workshops and factories, were certainly busily engaged in the work that late Victorian society deemed appropriate for them. I imagine that in the course of their working day they would have had some lively and interesting conversations of their own.

**July 29** – Can you believe that Markham Village has, on its Main Street, a residence so grand that it has been called a *chateau*? Chateau Ferrier is a large, red brick house of two and a half storeys at 307 Main Street North. It's the most elaborate of the old houses that line both sides of Main Street, Mount Joy. From an architectural standpoint it is noteworthy for having been the last house in the vicinity to have been built in the full-blown, highly ornamental style of the late Victorian period. Technically, the Victorian period ended with the death of Queen Victoria in 1901, but the architectural influences of the late nineteenth century persisted into the early years of the twentieth century. The Ferrier residence was built in 1903. Many other houses on the street, constructed in the early years of the new century, were rendered in the emerging Edwardian Classical and late Queen Anne Revival styles. The practical form of the "American Foursquare," with its simple cubic plan and minimal decorative embellishments was well-suited to suburban lots such as those found in this part of the community. This house stands out as an anomaly on the east side of Main. Chateau Ferrier was constructed as the home of a successful Markham Village butcher, Albert "Bert" Ferrier. When new, the house boasted ornate wood trim on its many gables. We know this from archival photographs taken at about the time of construction. Most remarkable of all, Mr. Ferrier had a private museum in his impressive home. The museum was called "Freaks of the Animal World." To modern sensibilities, this display of genetic accidents was more akin to a carnival sideshow than a museum, but attitudes were different in those days and I am certain that many visitors to the museum were amazed at what they saw. Somehow, a two-headed calf always seems to be included in exhibits such as these. I saw one of these at the old Niagara Falls Museum when I was a boy, and found it to be repulsive rather than fascinating. The mounts in the Ferrier museum, based on a photo in the Markham Museum's collection, were good examples of the taxidermist's art. The Ferrier family owned this property until 1966.

In more recent times 307 Main Street North was home to David Tsubouchi, a well-known local lawyer who served as a M.P.P. and cabinet minister in several portfolios, including Culture, in the Conservative governments of Mike Harris and Ernie Eves during the period 1995-2003. Mr. Tsubouchi holds the distinction of being the first Japanese-Canadian to be elected to a provincial legislature in Canada. Before this, David Tsubouchi served two terms on Markham Council and was an important supporter of Markham's heritage conservation initiatives.

**July 30** – A coolish day for late July, but an ample amount of sunshine added a feeling of warmth. Outside of my window, a persistent breeze tossed the big leaves of the London plane tree in our front yard. I looked at the Farmer's Almanac and they accurately predicted a cooler than average July for the eastern portion of Southern Ontario this year, and also the periods of rainfall that have prevented peoples' lawns from getting that odd greyish-green tone from being too dry by this stage of the summer. Yesterday, I wrote about Mount Joy's chateau, so today I thought it would be interesting to contrast that fine old house with one of the humbler dwellings on Main Street, in the same neighbourhood. The stucco-clad Ontario Gothic cottage at 373 Main Street North looks a lot like some of the modest workers' cottages in Toronto that were so artfully captured by Group of Seven artist Lawren Harris in the 1910s. In working-class neighbourhoods of old Toronto there were rows of just this kind of small house: one storey in height, with a steep gable centred over the front door, containing a pointed-arched vent and decorative bargeboards or "gingerbread." The house at 373 Main Street North is the only example of this distinctive house form that I know of in old Markham Village. If its peaked front gable was ever trimmed with bargeboards, they are long gone, giving this small house a bit of a severe simplicity. The Gothic Revival vent has been boarded over. If bargeboards, shutters, and two-over-two windows were to be added back in a future restoration, this house would look even more like the charming cottages in Harris's classic old house paintings. This house was constructed on the Main Street frontage of John H. "Deer Park" Ramer's farm about 1877. It may have served as a tenant farmer's cottage or as separate accommodation for another member of the family.

**July 31 – August 2** – It's hard to believe that we're at the mid-point of the summer holidays already. I've noticed that evening is falling earlier now and that makes me a little sad. This is the Civic Holiday long weekend – Simcoe Day in Toronto, and previously in Markham too, I suppose, until 2019 when Markham's mayor, Frank Scarpitti declared that from now on this would be William Berczy Day. It makes sense that if Simcoe is considered the founder of York (later re-named Toronto), then Berczy is the acknowledged founder of Markham. It was in 1794 that William Berczy, artist and entrepreneur, led 64 or so German and Danish settler families to Markham Township, then largely a wilderness, to establish a community in the New World. The initial centre of the settlement was at German Mills, east of Thornhill, but for a number of reasons that location proved to be unsuitable after only a few years. Instead, a new centre of settlement that would stand the test of time formed around the area that would become

known as Unionville. Significantly, that was the location where a Lutheran Church was established as the cornerstone of the new community.

In the case of Markham Village, the Berczy families were not the founders of this eastern portion of the Township. Rather, it was a group of Pennsylvania-German Mennonites, other Americans, and a number of British immigrants that laid the foundation of what would become Markham's largest village. Here, Joseph Reesor is considered the "founding father". However, William Berczy still gets the credit for being the founder of the City of Markham. His statue may be seen at the north east corner of Sixteenth Avenue and Kennedy Road. Joseph Reesor doesn't have a statue. There are no images of what he looked like.

**August 3** - Now that we're getting into August, warmer temperatures are predicted for the week. The Tokyo 2020 Olympics are ongoing and Markham's Andre De Grasse won Bronze in the 100 metre race the other day. Tonight, I believe, he will run the 200 metres and, who knows, he could be a medal-winner again. I hope so. A hero for Canada and for his home town!

**August 4** - Andre De Grasse did it! This morning he was the gold medal winner in the 200 metre final. I learned that this was the first time a Canadian has won gold in this event since 1928. Wonderful news on a sunny summer day, made all the brighter for this show of Canadian and Markham pride. I'm sure that when Andre De Grasse returns home, our mayor will have some kind of celebration of his triumph planned. Maybe something impressive can be held outdoors, with the appropriate COVID-19 safety protocols. I'm interested to see what they do.

**August 5** - At the north-west corner of Main Street North and Wilson Street there's a small frame commercial building, one and a half storeys tall, clad in a sort of "mock Tudor" white stucco and dark wood framing that was in vogue for renovations in the 1970s. It doesn't look like much, dressed as it is and lacking any noteworthy architectural features, but this little old building has an interesting history. John Fogg, an English immigrant, established a bakery here about 1870. Every "Main Street" of old seems to have had at least one bakery. From my childhood in East York in the 1960s, I remember going with my family to a bakery in a row of shops on "The Danforth," just east of Woodbine Avenue. What a place to walk into, with that intoxicating smell of baking and baked goods. There were many loaves of bread, of course, and a glass showcase filled with a variety of baked goods, including eclairs (my mother's favourite), Empire cookies, gingerbread men (my favourite) and other specialties. Once you made your selection, the proprietor would place your goods into pristine white cardboard boxes and tie them up with white string. Mr. Fogg's bakery, from the recollections of the late Markham Historian John Lunau and from my research into old issues of the *Markham Economist*, also sold liquors and fine cigars. Another story from John Lunau's notes was about a parrot Mr. Fogg kept at the bakery that would speak to children (and other customers, I suppose). After John Fogg moved away, the bakery was

taken over by another Englishman, Thomas Hook. As the business grew, he relocated to a brick building further south on Main Street in 1888. Under the management of a series of owners, the Markham Bakery endured until the late 1960s at 27 Main Street North, until the building was demolished for redevelopment.<sup>6</sup> The Fogg-Hook bakery at 134 Main Street North remained a bakery under Thomas Hook's son, also named Thomas, from the late 1880s until about 1917. From 1920 to 1925, Albert R. Lewis, formerly of Scarborough Township, operated a butcher shop here before getting into the dairy business.

**August 6** – The big news at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics today was that the Canadian women's soccer team had won the gold. A tremendous accomplishment to add to the success of Canada's other medal winners during this out-of-the-ordinary Olympic games.

Now, from Tokyo back to Markham Village. If you venture a little further to the west of the old bakery, on the north side of Wilson Street you come upon a one and a half storey board and batten house that became part of the Markham Village Lanes commercial development in the late 1980s. This L-plan, Gothic Revival village dwelling retains the essential form of the original *circa* 1875 structure, but there isn't much actual historical material remaining, as the commercial conversion of the old house was more of a re-building than a restoration. The average person wouldn't notice, but those who know about heritage buildings could tell this was a big make-over. The house was built by Robert Harrington of the Unionville Planing Mill, either as an investment property or for a client. In 1880, Harrington sold to Charles and Maria Carlton, merchants in the village whose home and business on the east side of Main Street North were destroyed in the fire of 1872. They may have rented the house at 12 Wilson Street before buying it. The Carltons were investors in property as well as general merchants. Their properties were registered in Maria's name. A noteworthy acquisition was their purchase of the Union Mills at Unionville in 1895. The family moved from Markham Village to Toronto, but is remembered locally in the name of Carlton Road. Their former residence at 12 Wilson Street, while lacking in genuine historical material, still provides, on this small street, a measure of continuity with the past and helps tell the story of the area.

**August 7** – In the mid to late afternoon, a massive amount of rain fell, accompanied by a few rumbles of thunder. Peter Street was flowing like a river toward its southerly end. This is the biggest rainstorm I have seen in a while. Nothing much in the way of wind though, with torrents of rain falling straight down.

**August 8** – The closing ceremony for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Total medal count for Canada, 24, with 7 of these being gold medals. They say this was the most costly Olympic games ever held (so far), mostly I believe because of the pandemic. There were not as many paying spectators in the stands, for one thing.

Today has been warm and cloudy. Back in April, I was looking for more information, and possibly a photograph, of the red brick farmhouse of Joseph Reesor and Anna Lichte Reesor, the founders of Markham Village. Although I made several inquiries, even speaking to a person who recalled an abandoned house not far from Markham District High School, I couldn't get any really detailed information about the house or a photograph. I did learn that the Mennonite Georgian farmhouse of John L. Reesor, one of the sons of Joseph and Anna Reesor, still stands on its original site on the north side of Sixteenth Avenue, east of Williamson Road. The former farmhouse now forms the centrepiece of a townhouse development. This substantial, two storey, red brick house, was built about 1850. It includes a traditional Pennsylvania-German "doddy house" at its western end. The designs for houses of this type were very conservative and followed a fairly standard pattern. I think it is reasonable to suggest that the long-demolished farmhouse of Joseph and Anna Reesor may have generally looked like the home of their son. Perhaps some day a photograph will surface that will answer the question, but the reality is that sometimes research comes to a dead end. That's part of the challenge of looking into the past, where we only have the fragments that remain.

**August 9** – Fred Robbins called this afternoon with a question about chimneys in old houses. He is researching an old farmhouse in the crossroads community of Ringwood that has a brick chimney centred on its roof ridge, a feature that he wondered was unusual. I told him that in most early houses in this area, and in Southern Ontario in general, gable-end chimneys were the norm. Larger houses had chimneys at each gable end, smaller houses may have only had one gable end chimney. Of course, there were exceptions, such as the *circa* 1825 Joshua Miller House in Markham Heritage Estates, and the 1817 Reverend William Jenkins House that stood at Cashel until recent times. Centre chimneys were a typical feature of post-Medieval houses in the New England colonies. They served a cluster of fireplaces, and with the chimney wholly within the building, they radiated additional heat for the interior. When Georgian architecture, with its formal centre hall plan began to become popular in New England, fireplaces and their chimneys were placed on the gable end walls. It was this style of domestic architecture that came to Upper Canada with the Loyalists after the American Revolution. It was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that central chimneys re-appeared to serve coal furnaces in the new house designs that no longer featured an open centre hall. When it comes to chimneys, I remember my mother saying during family drives in the country that you could always tell which houses were the old ones if there were two chimneys.

**August 10** – Just before lunchtime today there was much activity at the bird feeder that is next to our side porch. I saw both male and female purple finches, American goldfinches, and a male cardinal that had been singing from way up high in his favourite cedar tree in our neighbour's yard. Then there was a downy woodpecker and a group of aggressive sparrows that chased other birds away, notwithstanding their small size. At least I think they were sparrows. These small beige birds are difficult to identify, even with the help of my guidebook on Canadian birds. Sometimes there is

little or no activity at the feeder for extended periods of time, and other times it's a free-for-all that is amusing to watch from the kitchen window or back patio. Today, I found myself thinking about the benefit that people get from the simple observation of nature, if they can find the time to keep still and watch and listen for a while. I wonder how different the diversity of bird life in our village was while the surrounding land was still in agricultural use. Perhaps some birds were a nuisance to the farmers, which makes me think of scarecrows. Were scarecrows used on Markham farms? That's a question I might ask Lorne Smith some time.

**August 11** – Where was the last outhouse or privy in Markham Village? I think I know. I think it was the little red and white shed in the back corner of 31 Peter Street. I'm sure it had been many years since the outhouse had actually been used for its original purpose, then converted to a small storage shed for garden tools or something like that. The house, built in 1892, was constructed as the home of Herbert and Sarah Quantz.<sup>7</sup> Prior to renovations and a major addition being started a couple of years ago, the outhouse was still there, next to the neighbour's carriage shed. I should have taken a photograph, but I didn't. One day, it was gone along with some small trees and shrubs that needed to be removed to make room for the new construction. I read in Catherine Brydon's *Markham 1900 -2000, Our Past Inspires Our Future*, that Markham Village got its first sewage treatment plant in 1966.<sup>8</sup> Prior to that, Lorne Smith says as soon as households had water pressure, they installed septic systems. I expect that households didn't get indoor facilities all at the same time, so many outhouses probably remained in use until finally, every home, business and facility had them. One by one the outhouses disappeared, except for the one at 31 Peter Street that managed to hang on into the 2010s. When our old garage was demolished in 2016 and a new one was constructed in its place, the movement of some of the earth around our back yard turned up some broken pieces of pottery, including part of what I believe was a chamber pot. This makes me think our outhouse was at the rear of our lot, next to or even attached to the original garage. Archaeologists have said that the privy pit is one of the best places to find domestic artifacts, since broken dishes, cups and used bottles were often disposed of in the outhouse.

**August 12** – The morning began with heavy rain, then cleared up for a very pleasant summer day. Today it was reported on the news that there may be a federal election on September 20. Should be an interesting one given that we remain in the pandemic. Today, I drove past the Markham Museum, which has been closed since all of this began in March, 2020. From what I have heard, the Museum and other cultural facilities in Markham will remain closed for an indefinite period. To hear that was disappointing because the historical archives will not be available to researchers, so anyone wishing to look into anything will have to rely on resources posted on the internet. Commerce is coming back to life with the easing of restrictions, and that is good, but isn't culture a meaningful part of having a healthy community?

**August 13** – Every other Friday, in our area we have garbage pick-up. I’ve observed from time to time that some households have put pieces of antique furniture out a day or so early in case anyone wants to take them. This is much better than seeing something both interesting and useful go to landfill. Chairs are the antique items most often put to the curb. I have to admit that I have been tempted to bring something home, even though we have more furniture (especially chairs) than we need. One time, I saw an Eastlake-style chair of the 1870s that was too good to pass up, and now it serves as a desk chair in our upstairs study.

**August 14 – 15** – This has been a weekend for working in the garden. Ample rain has brought our garden weeds up in their full glory. Once you really get looking, the infiltration of weeds among the plants you want to keep is surprising, and gathered up, the volume of plant material that goes into those brown yard waste bags is simply astonishing.

I was thinking about some of the lesser-known historical buildings in the village. Much has been written about the iconic Wedding Cake House, Maple Villa and the Tremont House Hotel, all worthy of being celebrated as landmarks of Markham Village, but there are also many other places with their unique stories. An old house known to very few is the Richard Sylvester House at 88 Main Street South, at the southern end of the neighbourhood known as Vinegar Hill to some, and to others, Vinegar Dip. I think “Vinegar Hill” is the right name. The small frame cottage, a low, one storey structure, is well-hidden from view, in part by its location on the property and otherwise by a high, solid board fence. The only part you can see as you drive by on busy Main Street is a garage door in the hillside that looks something like the entrance to the secret lair of a superhero (I’m thinking about the old Batman episodes of the 1960s). In truth, the garage door, now not in use, leads to the basement of a modest dwelling built by Irish immigrants Richard and Margaret Sylvester in the year 1845. This was their second home on the property, and perhaps it replaced a log shanty. The Sylvesters purchased the property in 1828, during the early days of Reesorville’s development. We know from the township directory that they were living here in 1837.<sup>9</sup> The lot was purchased from Peter Milne, the prominent owner of the Markham Mills on the Rouge. This leads me to speculate that Richard Sylvester may have been a worker at the grist mill or woolen mill. By 1861, he was retired. The Sylvester House has been added to and gently updated for modern-day living, but for its age, it is remarkably well-preserved as far as original materials and design features are concerned. Its design is simple, based on the Georgian architectural tradition, and its wall construction is plank-on-plank. I am told that it once was home to an artist who had a studio in a small frame building that still stands on the property...but I cannot recall his name.

**August 16** – Continuing on the theme of hidden historical houses, the house at 31 Church Street is not hidden by topography or a high wooden fence, but rather by its non-historical appearance. This small frame house, clad in dark brown wood siding, looks like a rather plain bungalow of the 1940s or 1950s. Additions and renovations

mask its true age. The original part forms the western end of the building, which was constructed *circa* 1855 for retired Methodist itinerant preacher, Cornelius Flummerfeldt and his wife, Ann (Washington) Flummerfeldt.<sup>10</sup> His name sounds quite theatrical to me, as if he was a character in a play or novel. Cornelius Flummerfeldt was born in Pennsylvania and came to Upper Canada in 1797. During the War of 1812, he served with the Canadian militia, and is said to have taken part in the famous Battle of Queenston Heights. Flummerfeldt initially settled in the southern part of Scarborough Township, and while trying his hand at being a pioneer, became inspired to a life of service to the Methodist Church, beginning as a lay-preacher in association with the Reverend William Ryerson of the Town of York. Cornelius Flummerfeldt was a circuit preacher, travelling throughout the York Circuit, a large and important area to serve in those early days. He was ordained in 1838, and was a distinguished servant of the Methodist Church. In 1855, Reverend Flummerfeldt retired to the small frame house that still stands on the south side of Church Street, in the heart of old Markham Village.

**August 17** – On Sunday, Canadians learned that a “snap” federal election would indeed be held on September 20. Today’s news reported that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau would be somewhere in Markham to make an announcement. I later found out that the announcement was about a child care programme and was made not from the forecourt of City Hall, but from a citizen’s private back yard. In election campaigns over the years, I’m sure some prominent politicians must have made stops in Markham Village, perhaps making their promises and sharing their vision for the nation on the front steps of the Old Town Hall. I imagine a perusal of old newspapers may reveal who stopped here during their campaign in an effort to impress the electorate of a younger Canada. Was it MacDonald? Laurier? Mackenzie King? It would be interesting to know.

**August 18** – The weather this week has been hot and humid, with periods of cloudy skies and rain popping up in a variety of places. The weather has been influenced by Hurricane Fred in the south, which by now has been downgraded to a tropical depression. I think it is remarkable how weather systems so far away can affect our local weather conditions. The rain coming out of Fred has mostly missed us here in Markham Village. Classic August heat and humidity have likely made the newly-reopened Morgan Park Pool a busy place.

**August 19** – A while back I was contacted again by the filmmaker who did a documentary on Markham Heritage Estates. This time Stefano was interested in downtown Markham. Immediately, I thought, wait – the Markham Arts Council already did a documentary on Markham Village, wonderfully narrated by Dianne More of the Markham Village Conservancy. Then I realized the filmmaker meant the *new* Downtown Markham, or Markham Centre, which I like to call the “entertainment district” because of the cinemas, restaurants, and the Pride of Canada Carousel. It’s an emerging urban centre that has been gradually developing for years until this point in time, when it has achieved enough critical mass to become a destination. I’m thinking of the Pan Am Centre and the future campus of York University. A few years ago, the



Markham Village B.I.A. expressed their position that Markham Village is the original “Downtown Markham” and the name should not be applied to Markham Centre as it was already taken. Historically, Markham Village was the largest village in the Township and it is today our largest heritage conservation district. I find it interesting that in my research into the early history and development of Markham that although the first post office was established in Markham Village, it was Unionville, a smaller village, that became the administrative centre for the municipality. Unionville didn’t have a post office until 1850. As I write this commentary in 2021, the debate about who gets to call their area “Downtown Markham” seems to have quietened down, but I think that question may not be easily resolved.

**August 20** – Who remembers the pair of silos at the north west corner of Sixteenth Avenue and Ninth Line? They were landmarks on this corner before the new neighbourhood of Greensborough was developed. The silos disappeared about 18 years ago, in my estimation. The silos were all that remained to show that a barn complex from a vanished farm once stood here. Did the barn burn down, or slowly crumble? Did its timbers get salvaged for some other purpose? This must have been one of the last small farms in the vicinity of Mount Joy. I recall that one of the silos was more interesting than the other. It was made of grey concrete block with white block accents. Near the top of the tower there was a decorative band with cross-shaped or plus-sign motifs adding a little something to a utilitarian structure. They were probably about 80 years old when the day came that they were not longer there, and with their loss another trace of the former agricultural landscape disappeared from the neighbourhood. Now there is a new community of closely-packed homes with no visible link to the past, with nothing to recall the farmhouse, barns, orchards and fields that once occupied this same space. A quick glance in the *Historical Atlas of York County, 1878* reveals that this was the farm of one Luton Miller, a modest farm of perhaps only 40 acres. The map shows all the farmstead buildings close to the corner of the crossroads.

**August 21** – Recently one of Markham’s noteworthy members of a prominent early settler family passed away – George Reesor. I remember him as a regular participant at events and meetings held by the York Chapter of the Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario. George Reesor had a great interest in local history and the history of his family. The Reesors were the founders of Cedar Grove in the early years of the nineteenth century. One afternoon, several years ago, I had the pleasure of visiting George at his country property in Whitchurch-Stouffville, where he showed me a number of books that he had produced on historical topics that were of special interest to him. These were projects he was very proud of and he enjoyed sharing them. So much history and so many stories reside within the memories of people like George Reesor, who lived a long life (87 years) and made an effort to remember the things that interested him. It’s a fortunate thing that there are people like the late George Reesor that recall the past and are generous about sharing what they know. If we are lucky,

such people, full of knowledge, take the time to write down their memories so they will live on.

**August 22** – The *Farmer's Almanac* was correct in its prediction of mid-August being one of the two hottest periods of the year. We've had temperatures in the high 20s and low 30s for several days, with very little rainfall. The humidex has been high, amplifying the effect of the summer heat. Still, due to rainfall that happened in July and early August, the landscape remains uncharacteristically green for this time of year. This morning, I noticed much bird activity when I first went outside. The trees and shrubs all around our yard were filled with a confusing chatter of birdsong and bird calls, but there were few birds to be seen. That changed after a while and I saw male and female cardinals, a blue jay, nuthatches and sparrows. When I went outside again in the mid-afternoon, everything had gone quiet. Maybe the birds were seeking cooler places to rest while they waited for the heat of the afternoon to pass.

**August 23** – My wife, Linda, poured herself a glass of chocolate milk and that got me thinking about the old Markham Dairy that stood until fairly recent times just south of Parkway Avenue, on Town Crier Lane.<sup>11</sup> The location was east of Grace Anglican Church. The dairy was started by Albert Richard Lewis in the mid-1920s. His son, Carman, worked with his father, then became a partner in the family business once he completed high school. Something that set this particular dairy apart from the others was its production of chocolate milk. Markham Dairy was the first in the region to produce and distribute this popular product. As the business grew, the old frame building that served the dairy was replaced with a modern, two-storey concrete block structure in 1942. The main floor contained the dairy operation, and the upstairs was an apartment for Carman Lewis and his wife. The building was well-suited to its purpose and like most industrial structures of its time, it was simply designed. Still, the Markham Dairy was an attractive building, with white stucco walls and bright yellow steel casement windows. The construction of the new dairy was a leap of faith in the business, but surprisingly, after only two years of operations in the new facility, the Markham Dairy was sold to a local competitor. The property and building remained in the ownership of the Lewis family, and Carman Lewis continued to reside there for years. When redevelopment of the property became a reality for the owners, the fate of the old dairy building was the subject of spirited debate about what a community considers to be of heritage value. Right away, the building's relatively young age, concrete block construction and brief time as a functioning dairy were presented as arguments against its preservation. Heritage advocates presented compelling arguments in favour of its preservation, and proposed that the building could be incorporated as a unique residence within the new development being considered. Evidence for and against was gathered and digested and ultimately thrown into the uncertain arena of local politics. In the end, in 2019, the old Markham Dairy was demolished, and will be commemorated on a *Markham Remembered* interpretive plaque.

Heritage conservation has always had its challenges, resting on ground that is not so solidly based on science as environmental preservation is. It's harder for people to find common ground when it comes to deciding what is valuable enough to preserve, and which things can be let go. With so many social justice issues taking hold worldwide in the popular imagination, old assumptions about history and its landmarks are being challenged like never before.

**August 24** - Just north of the upper limit of the Mount Joy community is a new attraction. A large field of yellow sunflowers has been planted on a section of a sod farm. I noticed this on the weekend while driving north on Highway 48 and seeing that vehicles slow down for something. I had time to take a quick glance at this spectacular display, and was instantly reminded of Van Gogh's famous paintings of sunflowers. This is probably where the idea came from in the creation of this local attraction. People were parking and taking "selfies" in front of this living painting to become part of an artistic experience. At the same time, in Toronto, there is an installation of virtual versions of Van Gogh's art that is being presented in the form of projections rather than physical paintings - a unique, creative approach to present this wonderful artwork to the public.

**August 25** - The weather experts say that this may be the hottest day yet this year in the GTA. The high was 32 degrees (89.6 under the old Fahrenheit system), with a humidex of 40 (which felt like 104 degrees Fahrenheit). It seemed to me that we already had a day or two as hot as this a little while ago. The day indeed turned out to be quite hot, but no records were set today, maybe because of cloudy skies. I thought I might have heard some low rumbles of thunder in the afternoon, but it may have been work going on along the railway line. The GO line is supposed to be electrified, and I expect the work must relate to that somehow. I'm not sure when the electrification will take place, but I have heard that there will be tall poles carrying the wires that will change the look of the landscape. This makes me think of the telegraph lines that used to follow alongside roads and railway lines. Antique communication technology. Markham Village had a telegraph office at 140 Main Street North, operated by Joseph Browning, the son of the village jeweler and watchmaker. Census information reveals that this was at least as early as 1861. The one-storey Browning House later became the home of the village library, and in more recent times, a small restaurant within Markham Village Lanes.

**August 26** - In the late afternoon, there were loud booms of thunder, so loud that the storm must have been directly overhead. Torrents of sustained rainfall followed for some time. Much rainwater fell in our area in this one afternoon storm. After supper, the sun was out and the sky was mostly clear, with almost all evidence of the rain absorbed into the ground or evaporated. Where did it all go?

**August 27** - Lorne Smith called this afternoon to tell me about a collection of photographs he recently received from a family in Minden, Ontario. The black and white photographs are of Main Street, Markham Village, in the mid-1940s. He's not sure

how this collection made its way to Minden. They show a number of views of the Tremont House Hotel, Woodcock's Garage next door to the south, and other views of the street taken in the same general area, including a parade. Lorne's relatives operated the garage at the corner of Main and Church Streets. The buildings are still there at 121 Main Street North, including the two-storey frame store and a metal-clad building behind it that had three garage bays. He told me a story of an accident that happened in 1947 when a driver lost control of his car while turning the corner, injuring several people who were in front of the garage at the time, including a cousin of his. Luckily the car didn't hit the two gas pumps at the front of the business. The collection of photographs includes images taken after the accident that show the car on its side. The Woodcock family owned this property from 1930 until 1987. Lorne said he would try to find out when the garage was in operation. The building fronting on Main Street used to have a boomtown front.<sup>12</sup> It was built about 1875 by John Blakely, a local carpenter-builder, who rented out the store for income. In the early 1900s a grocery store occupied the space. Based on old photographs, the boomtown front was still in place in 1911, but by the 1940s, it had been removed.

**August 28** – The late afternoon and early evening were dominated by noisy thunderstorms. The dog has not enjoyed the weather this month at all. Today's storms began with low, distant rumbles of thunder heard about 4:00 p.m. when most of the sky was blue and the sun was shining.

**August 29** – The day was especially hot and humid. While New Orleans was bracing for the arrival of Hurricane Ida, expected to make landfall as a category 4 storm, all was calm here until the evening when we were hit by a couple of strong thunderstorms. The storm at 9:00 p.m. was accompanied by strong winds. The amount of rain was so great it resembled a curtain, and Peter Street flowed like a river. We went out onto the front porch for a while to take in the drama of this impressive storm. The electricity blinked a couple of times but fortunately we didn't experience a power failure. A few branches got blown down on our street, but nothing major.

Coyote sightings are being reported again after going quiet for a while. The adults have been reported to be quite aggressive at times, giving people good reason to be concerned about the safety of their pets.

**August 30** – Fred Robbins and I were talking about log houses and their construction, a special interest of mine. He was describing details of the construction of the Scadding Cabin at Exhibition Place that he had recently measured and photographed in response to an inquiry from an interested party in the U.S. In the vicinity of Markham Village, the only log house to be found is the *circa* 1850 Maxwell Log Cabin at the Markham Museum. It was relocated from the Rouge Valley in Scarborough in the early days of the museum's development to represent the first home of a settler's family. There must not have been a suitable log house from Markham available at the time. For many years,

this house of hewn logs stood out in front of the old Mount Joy School. It was later moved into the museum village area as part of a new museum master plan initiative.

Markham's agricultural prosperity, thanks to fertile soils, a favourable climate, and access to a large market enabled most of the township's farmers to replace their humble log dwellings with more substantial residences of frame, brick and stone by the latter half of the nineteenth century. Finally there came the time where only one log house from the early days of colonial settlement remained on its original site, the Philip Eckardt Log House north of Unionville. I presume that this significant early house was not moved to the Markham Museum because it was in use as a tenant cottage. It certainly deserves to be worthy of being in a museum. In the end, from a contemporary heritage conservation viewpoint, the *circa* 1800 dwelling retains its historical and contextual value by being in its original location, even if some of its architectural value has been compromised by it becoming a wing of a modern subdivision house and by having some of its early features altered or removed.

**August 31** – Today was the deadline for American military personnel to leave Afghanistan and thereby conclude the longest war in American history – 20 years. The last soldier actually left yesterday, and there was a photograph of the soldier on the news this morning as he boarded a military aircraft. As I look around our community, I am reminded of how fortunate we are to reside in the peace and stability of Canada. I wonder if any of the Afghans that were lucky enough to be evacuated from the uncertain future of their country will end up living in Markham, perhaps even in Markham Village.

**September 1** – The first day of September is here and already this morning there is a change in the air. Yesterday, it felt summer-like; today you can sense the onset of fall. The first coolish days of September always energize me, and I start thinking about new projects I might get to work on. It's like a new beginning, more so than New Year's Day, and I suppose this feeling is a hold-over from my school days when there was a sense of excitement about the start of the fall term and new classes, new teachers, and who might be in my classes as fellow students.

**September 2** – The LCBO (liquor store) at the north-east corner of Main Street North and Ramona Boulevard is said to stand on the site of the enterprising Robinson family's first tannery in Markham Village.<sup>13</sup> The family patriarch, William Robinson, established a tannery in the Town of York after emigrating from Pennsylvania to Upper Canada with his family in the early nineteenth century. After a number of years in York, Robinson purchased land at the north end of the area that would later become Reesorville, then Markham Village. It's not certain when William Robinson moved his tannery business up here. The Markham property was purchased in 1809, so it could have been early. The family next established a larger tannery on the west side of the village, where Robinson Street crosses Robinson Creek. I read somewhere that the first tannery building, the one that stood where the liquor store is now, became an

outbuilding on the farm of Andrew Robinson, one of William's sons. That building, converted to a garage behind the farmhouse at 14 Ramona, was demolished a few years ago to make way for a custom home following the severance of the eastern part of the property.

**September 3** – I wonder how many people remember what it was like to visit an outlet of the Liquor Control Board of Ontario in the 1960s. Just the name evokes the era of temperance societies and prohibition. The LCBO sounds much more friendly. I recall going into one of these liquor stores a few times with my father. The atmosphere was that of a government office and felt very formal and official. It seemed like you were doing something wrong; something the government was reluctantly allowing you to do. As I remember, there was no product on display, rather the customers selected what they wanted from a printed list at a kiosk at the front of the store. A form was filled out and handed to a staffer at a counter who retrieved your item or items from a storeroom in the back. I'm not sure how far back the Markham Village LCBO goes, but if it does date back to the time I have described, I expect the local experience was much the same.

**September 4 – Labour Day Weekend.** This weekend is the dividing line between summer vacation and back to business. Traffic will be busier with school back in session. At this point in time, the country is in the thick of the federal election campaign. Signs are appearing on people's front lawns. Not too many yet. Around the neighbourhood I see signs for the Liberal and Conservative candidates, but none yet for the other parties. I'll keep my eyes open for any newcomers over the next weeks. We vote on September 20. In our house, we choose not to reveal the colour of our political stripes by displaying a lawn sign.

Today was a warmer day than yesterday.

**September 5** – Another warm day, made all the more pleasant from an absence of humidity. In the evening, I looked at the collection of photographs of Markham Village in the 1940s, loaned to me by Lorne Smith. The people from Minden that sent the photographs to Lorne must have had a connection to Markham Village through relatives. One photograph shows Bill and Nora Mitchell standing on the steps of a restaurant located at the north end of the Tremont House Hotel. A note with the photograph dates it to about 1946, when this couple were helping out at the restaurant. It looked like a nice place. A sign above the double doors read:

"TREMONT RESTAURANT – THE HOUSE OF GOOD EATS  
SODAS & LIGHT LUNCHES"

There were other views of the hotel from around the same time period that showed another storefront at the south end of the old hotel that housed a barber shop. Lorne Smith recalls the barber's name was Art Rae. At this time, both the upper and lower parts of the front verandah were still in place. The centre section of the verandah,

containing the main entrance to the hotel, was open, and the storefronts were contained within the ends of the verandah that had been enclosed. It was good to see images of this Markham Village landmark in its better days. Lorne told me that at the time of the car accident that occurred in front of Woodcock's Garage next door, the restaurant was the only part of the Tremont House Hotel that was in use.

**September 6 – Labour Day.** Thinking again of the Tremont Restaurant, it seems that almost every small town has a diner like this, a place where locals go for breakfast or lunch, where the wait staff knows their “regulars” and how they take their coffee. I would say the Uncle Joe's is Markham Village's local diner. These restaurants are never part of a chain; rather they are one-of-a-kind businesses, often staffed by their owners. In spite of their individuality, they are mostly the same in how they are set up, with a long counter and some tables, and the type of general menu they offer. In small town restaurants, hearty breakfasts with traditional bacon, sausage, eggs, home fries and toast are standard fare. For lunch, there will almost certainly be grilled cheese, BLT, club sandwich and homemade soup, among other things like liver and onions. Many offer dinner as well. Dependable, traditional, simple food that is very good more often than not. These restaurants are a community meeting place for locals, and offer a decent, affordable meals for visitors. This is one thing that has not changed much since the time of the Tremont Restaurant.

**September 7 –** A warm, sunny day. It was the first day of school for some areas of the GTA, but not in York Region. Significant thunder storms were forecast for this evening, with rain at various intervals during the night. The first storm rolled in from the west with an ominous-looking dark, grey shelf cloud about 7:00 p.m. There was heavy rain and marble-sized hail. We were concerned about some young rabbits that live in a shallow den in a section of our lawn, in a very exposed place. When we checked, it looked like the rabbits had taken shelter elsewhere.

**September 8 –** Today I'm taking a further look at the 1940s views of Markham Village loaned to me by Lorne Smith. There are views of both sides of Main Street, taken in the vicinity of Robinson Street and Church Street. It is noteworthy that most of the buildings shown in the photographs are still standing, with the exception of the Franklin House Hotel just north of the Old Town Hall. These photographs, dating from shortly after the end of the Second World War, show the village at a time just before the big changes that were to come as Canada's post-war growth got underway. This growth, in population, the economy, and in development, would transform Markham Village from a rural service centre to an extension of Toronto's suburbs. The subdivision of farms on the edge of the village was only a few years in the future when the photographer documented Main Street in the vicinity of the Tremont House Hotel.

Today was much like yesterday, with a sunny start followed by rainstorms in the evening.

**September 9** – This was the first day of school for elementary and secondary school students in York Region. The Catholic schools in York had their first day yesterday. The schools that I am most familiar with because they are in or near Markham Village are Franklin Street Public School and Markham District High School. I believe that Franklin Street offers a French immersion programme. Getting the school year started is a big step toward our community getting back to a feeling of normalcy.

Franklin Street Public School's survival is a bit of a heritage conservation miracle in the field of education, which prefers to replace older schools and build new. I think it is noteworthy that Markham Village has the oldest public school in York Region that is still in its original use.<sup>14</sup> Yes, there are older schools around, one-room schoolhouses converted to other uses, but this one has been in continuous use since it was built. Franklin Street Public School, 1886, originally named Markham Village Public School S.S. No. 15, was designed in the Italianate style, with a cube-like form, large, round-arched windows, and a hipped roof. Its polychrome brickwork, with red brick accented with buff-coloured "white brick," is typical of both the architectural style and the time period. Changes have been made to the building, such as the addition of an enclosed stairway on the west façade, and the replacement of some of the original side windows with big, rectangular windows of the 1950s, but overall, Franklin Street Public School still retains most of its original character. It would be nice to see the altered windows restored, but I think that is unlikely with the way school board budgets are. I had the opportunity to tour the school a number of years ago, when window replacement and restoration options were being discussed. I was surprised to see how much of the 1880s woodwork was still in place on the interior.

**September 10** – A fall feel in the air today, sun and clouds. Less windy than it has been for the last several days. There are more frequent GO trains running now than we are into September. By now most of the cottagers have returned to their southern homes after quite a nice summer season. In the afternoon it was about as perfect a summer day as you could wish for. My across-the-street neighbour, Jeffery, spoke to me about all of the walnuts falling from the big black walnut trees that have branches overhanging his back yard. He told me he has collected a garbage pail full so that the squirrels don't make a nuisance out of them. When the squirrels break open the green husks, the dark nuts inside make quite a mess and stain everything they touch. The squirrels also stash the nuts away, sometimes in places you don't want them to be. By collecting the walnuts while still in their husks, and putting them into yard waste bags for collection and composting, a lot of trouble and mess is avoided, says my neighbour.

**September 11 – September 12** – This weekend was the annual Macedonian Cultural Festival at St. Dimitrija Solunski Macedonian Orthodox Church. It's an outdoor event held in the church's back parking lot. On Saturday afternoon, we were out in the back yard and heard live music coming from somewhere to the east of us. At first, we thought it was coming from the Station Plaza opposite the train station, because the music school that has recently relocated there from another location in the village has



held outdoor performances on Friday evenings. I think the performers may be some of their students. I took a walk over to Main Street to have a look, and it turned out that the music was coming from the church. There was a blend of traditional and contemporary music, both instrumental only and instrumental accompanied by vocals. Being a breezy day, the sound sometimes carried over to our area very clear, but at other times it was distorted. St. Dimitrija's is a remarkable cultural feature in Markham Village. It was built in 1993 and its exterior character is modern, but inside, there is breathtaking Byzantine-style decoration on the walls and ceiling. This is most unexpected when you see it for the first time, given the contemporary look of the exterior. The church has been a featured site in many Doors Open Markham events. I was fortunate enough to meet the artist several years ago, and see his work in progress. At the time of my visit, the ceiling had not been painted, and the wall decoration was only partly completed. Even still, I could see that the final artwork would be magnificent, like a piece of the Old World transported to Markham Village. It was interesting to see the rough outlines of figures marked out in red lines on the white walls, next to completed figures. On Saturday, the music continued into the evening, and as the wind diminished, we could hear the performances more clearly. The festival continued on Sunday, but without the music.

**September 13** – Cameron Knight, who grew up in Mount Joy and was Richmond Hill's Local History Librarian for many years, dropped by for a surprise visit. He now lives in Southwestern Ontario, but was in town for the day. He had some questions about a couple of important historical buildings in Markham that he is familiar with. We talked about the *circa* 1800 Philip Eckardt Log House in the new Upper Unionville community, and the plans to reconstruct the 1817 Reverend William Jenkins House at Markham Heritage Estates. These historical buildings, of extraordinary significance, deserved better than the treatment they received. The Eckardt House is still standing but its conversion to meet today's standards for residential occupation have taken their toll on original elements. As for the Jenkins House, it is supposed to be reconstructed using some salvaged elements, but at the present time its future still seems uncertain.

Today was a fine September day, ideal for taking a long walk, but the opportunity to do so wasn't there.

**September 14** – Another visitor today at 4 Peter Street. Peter Wokral, my former colleague at the City of Markham's Heritage Section in the Planning and Urban Design Department, was in the area for a meeting and took the time to come by and pick up a copy of an old Peterboro Hardware catalogue reprint that I have. This company produced much of the ornate Eastlake-style builders' hardware seen in Late Victorian buildings, both locally and across much of the province. Peter was telling me that the Wedding Cake House at 48 Main Street North was going to have a new tenant – a Caribbean restaurant. This is the most distinctive heritage building in Markham Village. Everybody knows it. It's impossible to define this building's unique architectural character. I propose "Late Victorian Eclectic." This house, much adorned with layers of

decorative woodwork, does indeed remind you of a wedding cake, especially when it is painted entirely in white. The current colour scheme of blue siding and white trim diminished this effect to a degree. The Wedding Cake House was the first property in Markham to be designated as property of cultural heritage significance under the *Ontario Heritage Act*. It was built *circa* 1870 for James Speight, an owner of the Speight Wagon Company, and is said to have served to advertise the diverse products of the Speight family's large industrial complex.<sup>15</sup> It's been years since the Wedding Cake House has been in residential use. Real estate offices and a series of restaurants have come and gone in this landmark space. Lately, the house has been vacant after serving as a sales office for a residential development that has been planned for the land behind it.

A strong thunderstorm came through around 11:30 p.m.

**September 15** – I found out that a fire had occurred at the Wedding Cake House yesterday afternoon. I recall hearing fire engines loudly heading out from the fire station near our house. Renovations were underway for the new restaurant, and a contractor using a torch accidentally sparked a fire within the structure. This happened at about 4:30 p.m. Fortunately, the fire was at the rear of the historic building where there is a later addition, so for the most part the historical part of the Wedding Cake House was not seriously damaged.

**September 16** – A sunny day with warm temperatures. The sight of school buses picking up and dropping off students is a reassuring sign that we are transitioning out of the pandemic.

**September 17** – Today was a quiet day, spent mostly indoors despite very pleasant late summer weather. In the afternoon, I was looking at some old books of verse, thinking about how these writings from the past will not be read much, if at all, by later generations who will miss out on their artistry. Some books become obscure to the point where only a select few people will know of their existence, particularly writings that are not part of the school curriculum. We produce so much, and in all of that, only selected things remain generally known and valued.

**September 18** – It would be a crime to stay indoors on a day as fine as this. In the late morning, with members of my family, I made my first visit back to the Forest Therapy Trail at Springdale Park since June. With the summer's plant growth, the woods had become much denser since I had been here last. In some places, along the verges of the pathways bordering wooded areas, there were patches of goldenrod and purple asters. The pathway through the "cathedral" within the pine grove was dappled in sun and shadow, all very quiet except for some occasional bird calls that I did not recognize. If only I had an expert with me to identify the birds among the trees, which were heard but not seen. Robinson Creek was fast-flowing and dark, with a large volume of water moving noisily through the creek-bed boulders thanks to the large amount of rainfall

we've had lately, including a cloudburst that woke up the dog around 5:00 this morning.

**September 19** – Another picture-perfect late summer day. A gentle breeze was blowing as we set up our back yard for an engagement party for one of our sons and his fiancé. They will not actually get married until 2023 because the larger reception venues are backlogged due to the long-lasting pandemic. Except for some wasps buzzing around the table and food, we could not have asked for a better day.

**September 20** – The day of the federal election. The final ballot count could take up to four days, so I have heard. The polls have the Liberals in a small lead over the Conservatives. I avoided watching much of the coverage of the results on the news and waited to see the results next morning.

Steering the conversation away from politics, the other day I wrote about the Wedding Cake House, and someone told me you could see the fire damage on the back wall, but nothing in the front. I noticed one of the upstairs windows on the south side was affected and boarded up. Next door to the Wedding Cake House, at 40 Main Street North is a set of three brick rowhouses in the Second Empire style. This style is distinguished by the use of a mansard roof, a way of achieving a full second storey without increasing the height of a two-storey building. Historically, this roof type was called a French roof, because it was invented by a Parisian architect as a way of getting around building height restrictions. These row houses are among four sets in the same general style within Markham Village, and appear to have been constructed as rental properties suited to the needs of workers in local industries and their families. The row at 40 Main Street North is said to have housed some of the workers of the Speight Wagon Company, but they were not built by Speight. The developers were David Barkey, a farmer in Pickering Township, and a carpenter with the unusual name of Philander Jaynes, also from Pickering. The building dates from *circa* 1890. The mansard roof is clad in alternating patterns of wood shingles, a treatment that was intended in its time to mimic slate roofing used on this style of building in the city. Sometimes, the wood shingles were painted in different colours to enhance the effect. The current shingles are a restoration. An archival photograph from the early 1900s shows a deep Edwardian Classical verandah had been added to the building, which must have made the interiors very dark. Over time, the verandah was removed, and in the 1970s, the ground floor space was converted to commercial use. Today the three units have been combined to serve as a fine-dining Italian restaurant.

**September 21** – The last day of summer began blustery, but warm, with a brief, light rain shower around 8:30 in the morning. On the news it was reported that the Liberal Party and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had won a minority, very much in keeping with what the polls said yesterday. No significant changes resulted from the election, but mail-in ballots may have some effect on the final result once they are all counted.

Our local squirrels are busy with their walnut-gathering. I saw two of them fighting over an apple-sized walnut in its green husk. After their conflict, both of them scurried off in different directions, but left their prize behind. I heard a weather report today where the weather specialist spoke about the imminent change from summer to fall, and a prediction that wintery weather conditions may come to us sooner this year. No wonder the squirrels are busy.

## Fall 2021

**September 22- The Autumnal Equinox.** A rainy night last night, with periods of rain predicted for all of today, and into the evening. There was a coolness in the air this morning, appropriate for the first day of fall. A rainfall warning was issued due to the high volume of precipitation expected. The weather was not stormy, just wet. Fine rain fell straight down for hours.

Not far from my home on Peter Street is the oldest house in our neighbourhood, 304 Main Street North, *circa* 1848. I remember a time when it was covered in red insul-brick. Even so, you could tell it was quite old by its low profile and multi-paned windows. Its design follows the Georgian architectural tradition: simplicity and symmetry. This house stands out as something older among its Late Victorian and early twentieth century neighbours. The builder was Abraham Byer Ramer, one of the sons of Pennsylvania-German Mennonite settlers Peter Ramer and Elizabeth Byer. "A.B.," as he seems to have been commonly known, demonstrated a particular knack for carpentry and construction at a young age.<sup>1</sup> He built Jonas Ramer's first sawmill on Springdale Farm, and established a cabinet-maker's shop in the same building. By 1850, the furniture-making business had grown to the point where it was necessary to construct a large furniture factory near the north-west corner of Main Street and David Street (David Street came along later). A.B. Ramer lived in a clapboarded frame house to the south of the factory, 304 Main Street North. It is believed that part of the ground floor of the family home served as a showroom for the products of the business. It seems that A.B. had reached too far with his investment in the business, and sadly, it failed. By the mid-1870s, he had managed to turn things around and the business was re-invented to become a planing mill and sash and door factory to serve the needs of local builders. Israel, a son, was employed in the family business and lived in a brick house at 314 Main Street North.

A.B. Ramer is locally significant for more than just his business ventures – he is also credited with naming the community Mount Joy, after the Ramer family's original home in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.<sup>2</sup> In the late 1990s, 304 Main Street North was purchased by a builder and thoroughly renovated. As a result, an open-concept interior contrasts with the restored, clapboarded exterior. The furniture show room, sadly, was not preserved during the renovations, but it was supposed to have been located behind the double doors facing Main Street. When the interior was gutted, a large painted sign for the furniture factory was found embedded in the walls of the house, and donated to

the Markham Museum as a rare survivor of mid-nineteenth century commercial signage. Somewhere along the way, the early windows that lent such a feeling of great antiquity to this house were replaced by modern replicas that just don't give the same effect. It's too bad, but in spite of the loss of some original details, the former home of A.B. Ramer continues to serve as a reminder of the person who gave the community its name.

**September 23** – Yesterday, it rained all day long and into the evening; a fine, light rain. In the night, the rain intensified and carried on till daybreak. Sun and cloud today, with mostly cloudy skies. Just before lunchtime, I saw a robin hopping around on the front lawn of 9 Peter Street – the first robin I have seen for weeks. In the spring, we had a very active family of robins nesting on our property. I wonder where they went.

I visited Lorne Smith mid-morning to return the collection of 1940s photographs he had so kindly loaned me. We talked about a person he had recently visited in the Petawawa area who has three steam traction engines within a collection of old log farm buildings. There's also a restored log house. Lorne spoke about some other steam engines he knows about that are owned by private collectors, including a steam locomotive that is stored by its owner in a quarry in Uxbridge. Lorne also went on to say that Don Reesor, who grew up beside Reesor's Marmill, liked to see Locomotive No. 5303 that ran on the Markham-Lindsay-Belleville line pass through Markham Village. Mr. Reesor wished that he had bought the steam engine when it was replaced by a diesel, rather than to see it go for scrap. Such magnificent technology. Regrettably, most examples have been rendered inoperable as the result of heavy regulations, stringent inspection requirements, and the high cost of insurance. This situation came out of a tragic, deadly accident in the U.S. several years ago when a steam engine exploded. Prior to that, many museums held live demonstrations of traction engines and other steam-powered equipment, including the Markham Museum. Lorne also noted that the men that knew how to operate and maintain the old steam engines are getting on in age and fewer in number, creating another issue with holding demonstrations of this antique technology.

**September 24** – Cool and cloudy in the morning. It was supposed to warm up later, but a cold, brisk breeze kept a fresh feel in the air. The sun came out a few times, which was nice. In my Mount Joy neighbourhood there is a building with an interesting, surprising and somewhat mysterious history at 300 Main Street North. This two-and-a-half story concrete block house also contains a business. The concrete block is moulded in an imitation of stone, which was the style back in 1905 when this building was erected as the combined home and tailor shop of Anson Hoover. The house, with the old shopfront skillfully closed in, is now oriented to the south, facing its large side yard rather than Main Street. A double-height verandah spans the south façade. Where this story gets especially interesting goes back to 1911, when the property was sold to Christina Byer Sauder, who had inherited a secret cancer cure from her father, David Byer.<sup>3</sup> I believe the treatment was used to address external cancers such as skin cancer and tumors. The Sauder House was the location of a cancer clinic from 1911 to 1922,

where patients were treated by Christina and her husband, Jonah. Looking at the property today, I can almost imagine patients sitting in the garden or on the verandah to enjoy fresh air and sunshine while they recovered from their treatment sessions. I have heard that the cancer treatment was an herbal compound that was applied to the affected area. The exact components of the compound were known only to the family. The story of the Byer cancer cure reminds me of the tradition of healers and herbalists in the Mennonite culture that I read about in Blodwen Davies' book *A String of Amber* earlier this year. I'm curious to know how successful the treatments were, and to learn if any aspects of the Byer treatment were comparable to present-day approaches.

**September 25** – Today was the beginning of a warming trend, but winter fashions are on display at the Markville Mall, so there is no escaping the reality of cooler, then colder, weather ahead. While driving past Elgin Mills Road on the way to the Rouge Park this afternoon, I noticed colourful straw bale signs announcing the upcoming Markham Fair, with the message “Markham Fair in a Flash.” Because of the pandemic, I at first assumed that this would be a virtual event, but I thought, what kind of fair would that be? At home, I looked at the fair's website and learned that the Markham Fair would be set up as a one-directional walk-through event from September 30 through October 3. This is planned as a ticketed event with a limited number of people being able to attend. This is very good news since the 2020 fair had to be cancelled altogether. This event is marked as the 177<sup>th</sup> year for the Markham Fair. The fair will have a modified programme, but with many of the traditional features included. Let's hope for nice fall weather.

**September 26** – Walked around the wetland in Cedar Valley Park in the mid-afternoon. The active birdlife of spring and early summer has diminished. Today, there were more human visitors here than avian ones. It was warm when the sun was out, but felt cool when the cloud cover shaded the pathway.

**September 27** – The patch of smooth asters we planted in the front garden last year seemed to take a long time to flower. The buds were evident for some time before they opened up. The same plant in the planter box at the back of the house flowered many days sooner, maybe due to differences in sun exposure in the places where they are. This is a native wildflower. The blooms are pale mauve with yellow centres, and I have noticed that they follow the direction of the sun as it moves across the sky during the course of the day. In the wild, I am seeing more of the dark purple flowers that I believe are called the New England aster.

**September 28** – Sunny, but the air was chilled with a brisk wind from the north-west today. Pots of mums in a variety of colours and container sizes are being offered for sale everywhere it seems – the grocery store, the garden centre, the home improvement store, and other places, too. This is a sure sign that we are in the fall season. It's fortunate that the plant world gives us this last show of colourful blooms as the

growing season winds down for the year. I'm starting to see some mums on display on neighbours' front porches.

**September 29** – On the topic of flowers once again, this afternoon I walked down Main Street to Tim Clark's Flowers at 97 Main Street North. Outside, I didn't see any mums on display, but what I did see was a long-standing business in Markham Village.<sup>4</sup> Tim Clark's first business venture here was a ladieswear shop, which he started just after the Second World War. In 1966, Clark switched to flowers, and continued the business until 1989, when it was sold to another owner who has kept the name that has been well-known for so long. The flower shop is located on the ground floor of a tall, imposing brick building that is one of a similar pair of commercial structures constructed by the Reesor family to rent out for income. The building at number 97 is the older of the two, erected by Christian Reesor *circa* 1873. The southerly building at 91 Main Street dates from *circa* 1885. Christian Reesor was a successful farmer in Locust Hill. His son, Frederick E. N. Reesor, inherited these commercial properties. Both buildings are three storeys, higher than the typical commercial block on Main Street. Their upper floors of the flower shop building may have served as residential quarters for the shop proprietor and his family, or for warehouse space, or perhaps both. The architecture is a simplified version of the Classic Revival and must have stood out in contrast to the more ornate Italianate commercial buildings that began to appear on Main Street in the 1870s and 1880s. In the 1890s, this building housed a grocery store. In 1902, Thomas B. Reive bought the property and established a general store that was later operated by his son, Howard S. Reive. A sign at the front of the store claimed it to be "Markham's Best Store."<sup>5</sup> Quite a claim! Tim Clark's Flowers came along later, and has become the oldest retail business in the village, as far as I know. I believe a couple of law firms and the local funeral home are in the same league but they are service businesses. When I walked through the Joseph Street Parkette that adjoins the building, I noted a boarded-up round-topped opening that looks like it was a side door at one time, probably a later alteration looking at the brickwork around it. Further back, I saw that Floyd's Barber Shop had relocated from its previous location on Robinson Street. The name is a reference to a 1960s television show, *Andy of Mayberry*, about a small-town sheriff in the southern U.S. The local barber on the show was named Floyd, and was one of the unique and slightly odd inhabitants of Mayberry.

**September 30** – This is the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, a federal statutory holiday intended to recognize the harm that Residential Schools inflicted upon generations of Canada's Indigenous peoples. Federally-regulated offices and services are closed today in recognition of this day of awareness and reflection, and those for whom this is not a statutory holiday are asked to also be aware of and reflect on this dark part of our national history. Markham marked this occasion in conjunction with orange shirt day and offered on-line programmes on Truth and Reconciliation and Indigenous culture and history. A number of years ago, I attended an event where representatives of the Indigenous community were talking about their traditional beliefs. This got me interested in learning more, and I was fortunate to find an excellent

book on the subject: *The Manitous – The Spiritual World of the Ojibway*, by Basil H. Johnston, a First Nations scholar that was living between Richmond Hill and the Cape Crocker Reserve on the Georgian Bay side of the Bruce Peninsula at the time of publishing, 1995. I recently re-read this remarkable book, and was once again captivated by the author's skill at documenting and communicating the spiritual heritage of his people. Highly recommended.

**October 1** – A fine day to begin the month of October. Today's high was 19 degrees, with clear skies. There was a slight breeze. While walking around 97 Main Street North on Wednesday, I passed by another building of historical interest at 11 Joseph Street, a little to the east of the Joseph Street Parkette. This property was once part of Christian Reesor's lot, which went all the way through from Main Street to Washington Street. A livery stable was built behind the Main Street commercial building *circa* 1890, or perhaps earlier than that. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines a livery stable as a

"Stable where horses are kept at livery (kept for an owner at a fixed charge) or let out for hire."

This simple, gable-roofed building of local red-orange brick is somewhat obscured as a heritage structure by a flat-roofed, modern front addition on the Joseph Street side. If you look at the east side wall and the gable end above the front addition, you can see that 11 Joseph Street is an old building that has been re-purposed. From 1902 to 1907, the livery stable was owned by William McMichael, who previously worked as a tinsmith. Business partners Richard Moore and Llewellyn Hagerman were the next to own and operate the livery stable. In time, as horses were becoming less common in favour of cars and trucks, the livery stable inevitably closed down. From 1947 to 1950, the building served as a meeting hall for the Markham District Veterans Association. When the Veterans Association purchased the former Presbyterian Church on Washington Street, the livery stable was sold to *The Markham Economist & Sun* for a newspaper office. Presently, the building is a wellness clinic.

Late afternoon, live music was heard coming from the Station Plaza, outside of the Carlaw Music School. Classic rock 'n' roll: the Rolling Stones, the Beatles and more. The music continued into the early evening.

**October 2** – Today was the best weather day for the next several days, based on the forecast. Sunny with a high of 26 degrees. As of tomorrow, a run of cloudy and rainy days is predicted to continue into the first half of next week. For the last two or three days, there was much bird activity around our yard. Mostly small birds that move so quickly they are difficult to see long enough to identify. One day, several small birds were taking seeds from the purple coneflowers in our back yard planter box. Yesterday and today, small twittering birds were darting to and fro in and around the cedars on our property. Their call is a "chip-chip" sound. Fred Robbins was here yesterday for a late afternoon visit on the patio, and he thought these noisy and very active little birds might be some kind of warbler. Several downy woodpeckers were also around, taking



seeds from the bird feeder and suet block. One of them must have been a juvenile because it was fairly small. These are handsome-looking birds but they are sometimes choosing to hammer away on our wooden heritage house, in spite of our efforts to deter them with the owl decoy I made and other attempts to frighten them away. For some reason they prefer to peck their pointy beaks on the siding of our addition.

**October 3** – Heavy rain fell in the pre-dawn hours, but was all done by daybreak. The day began mild and cloudy. This was mostly an indoor day for me. In his research into early members of the York Pioneer and Historical Society, Fred Robbins, the current president, was looking into the society's first president, Colonel Richard Denison, who served from 1869 to 1870. This led Fred to further research and to a very interesting Denison family connection to Markham Village and one of its most impressive, but sadly vanished, landmark buildings, the Maple Leaf Woollen Mill. Colonel Denison's son, Arthur Richard Denison, was a Toronto-based architect. One of Arthur Denison's earliest projects was a 4-storey, brick factory for Fred A. Clarry, at Markham Village. The year was 1886, the same year the building was constructed. Fred Clarry was a member of an early Markham Township family of English origin that settled just north of Mount Joy. The Clarry farmhouse was recently demolished. The woollen mill is generally associated with James Robinson, who owned a tannery on the west side of Robinson Creek and served as village reeve for a number of years. Although it was already known that Fred Clarry was involved with the woollen mill, this new information discovered by Fred Robbins in the *Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada 1800 – 1950*, a valuable on-line resource, shows that Fred Clarry was the original owner of this enterprise.<sup>6</sup> The land records for the parcels of land around the site of the building are difficult to follow due to the number and complexity of transactions, and it is challenging to see how James Robinson was connected to the business. Perhaps he was involved in its financing, or was a partner. More research is needed to unravel the story. I seem to recall a number of mortgages and changes of ownership, an indication the business went through some periods of financial difficulty. A tower at the front of the Maple Leaf Woollen Mill that was its crowning glory was also the source of its undoing. In 1917, a lightning strike on the tower started a devastating fire that turned the once-proud factory into a hollow ruin.<sup>7</sup> The building was not sufficiently insured to enable its rebuilding. Although the structure itself has disappeared from the landscape, an office building inspired by the old mill's design was constructed next door to the east a number of years ago, as the office of an insurance firm.

**October 4** – Above-seasonal temperatures were forecast for all of this week, but with a mix of rainy, cloudy and sunny conditions. A good week for seeking out stories on the streets of Markham Village. Lorne Smith recently talked to me about an old blacksmith shop that still stands at 10 Church Street, east of the parking lot of the Tremont Hotel. Standing in front of the shop, it is a low structure of poured concrete. If you look on the west side, from the parking lot, you can see how the formwork was moved up the wall after each pour was completed and set. Shrouded in small trees and shrubbery, from the street the building doesn't look very large or historic. It somewhat resembles a garage.

However, when viewed from the side, the old shop goes quite deep into the property. It has a corrugated metal roof, a set of double doors at the front, and windows and a door at the back. I first learned about this building from John Webster, who grew up in Markham and has, for many years, served as the City's official town crier. He told me it had been a repair shop before he rented it as the base for his Dickie Dee ice cream cart business, and a blacksmith shop before the repair shop. The blacksmith shop was remembered by his mother and his Uncle Carman. According to John Webster, the forge was in the south-east corner of the building, along with a block for the heavy anvil. Some blacksmithing tools remained on the property. Lorne Smith told me today that he can recall from his youth the blacksmith, Billy Payne, shoeing horses there in the 1940s. A young blacksmith by the name of Mr. Payne appears in front of the Morgan Blacksmith Shop on Main Street in an archival photograph in the collection of the Markham Museum. Was he Billy Payne? Stu Campbell did repairs in the shop after the days of Billy Payne. Maybe that was who was there before John Webster. This blacksmith shop looks to me like it dates from the time after the horse and buggy glory days of the trade, after the larger blacksmith shops on Main Street went out of service. Perhaps it was constructed in the 1930s. That would explain how Mr. Woodcock, who operated Woodcocks Garage nearby, recalled the slip-form method of poured concrete construction, another interesting detail related to me by John Webster.

Just after 7:00 p.m., I was out behind the house and heard the distinctive honking of several Canada geese passing overhead. They were close by, but from my vantage point, I could not see the part of the sky where they were to see if they were in their classic "V" position.

**October 5** – While walking Bailey, our Yorkshire terrier, this morning, I noticed that some trees on our street were beginning to show their autumn colours. Seeing this put me in mind of some lines from Bliss Carman, Canada's "unofficial" poet laureate of the early twentieth century:

"Now the joys of the road are chiefly these:/ A crimson touch on the hard-wood trees;/ A vagabond's morning wide and blue,/ In early fall when the wind walks too;"<sup>8</sup>

With my thoughts going back to Billy Payne's blacksmith shop, in doing a bit more research I saw that the shop's property was once part of a larger lot that included the house next door at 12 Church Street. This house, somewhat altered with an addition out the side and modern exterior materials, was built for Hugh Megill *circa* 1873. Megill was noted in Mitchell's Directory of 1866 as a "manufacturer of carriages, wagons, sleighs & c."<sup>9</sup> Megill was a member of the first council of Markham Village and captain of the Fire Brigade. His factory was originally located north of the Speight's wagon works. In 1875, Megill dismantled his factory building and re-erected it on his property on Church Street. I wonder if there was anything left of the old carriage factory when the blacksmith shop went up.

I think that it is noteworthy that 12 Church Street is a former residence of one of the members of the village's first council of 1873. I know that James Speight's impressive home, the Wedding Cake House, is still standing, but what of the houses of the other members of the first council? That is a question for another day.

**October 6** – There's a second-hand book store and art gallery in the village that I must admit I have never been in, at 154 Main Street North. I've looked in the display window many times though. The store is run by the Alfsen brothers, whose parents John and Marion Alfsen were accomplished artists.<sup>10</sup> John Alfsen taught at the Ontario College of Art, now the Ontario College of Art and Design University. Years before the Alfsen family lived here, this was the butcher shop and residence of William McNeely. The present building dates from 1909, as confirmed by a note in *The Markham Economist* of that year. It replaced an older building owned by the previous butcher on the premises, a Mr. McLean. Some time I will have to venture inside the book store. I see a lot of paperbacks through the window, but maybe there are treasures to be found there on shelves I cannot see from the outside.

**October 7** – I'm a bit of a collector of older Canadian books, among other things. My focus is on architecture, history, art and poetry. So yes, it is surprising that I have not perused the shelves of my local second-hand book store, but I've found interesting books in many other places. One book in my library stands out, not so much for its beautiful decoration by J.E.H. MacDonald of the Group of 7, or its contents, but rather for a touching inscription upon its flyleaf:

"To Dearest Betty  
May each year bring  
more happiness.

Mother & Daddy.

7<sup>th</sup> October, 1929"

This inscription is in an old copy of *Later Poems*, by Bliss Carman, Fifth Edition, 1926. I don't know who Betty is or was, but I hope that the loving wishes of her parents, likely made on her birthday, were fulfilled. I've had this book for a number of years and whenever I look at it, I always find it uplifting to read that heart-felt inscription.

**October 8** – Today was mostly cloudy, but pleasantly mild. The sun made a brief appearance in the morning, but it was not to last. As the leaves start to change colour, the sunburst honey locust trees in our area are really starting to stand out. Their autumn foliage is brilliant yellow, so the name "sunburst" is a good fit. There's a row of these trees that I noticed this afternoon along the frontage of the plaza at the north-east corner of Highway 7 and Galsworthy Drive. The sunburst honey locust is not a traditional village tree, so they are most often found in newer areas outside of the boundaries of the old village, or where people have planted them in more recent times. The plaza with the

colourful trees bordering its parking lot was the first to be built in Markham Village, starting with a Dominion supermarket in 1955, and joined by other stores four years later.<sup>11</sup> Today, a Shopper's Drug Mart is in the space where the Dominion used to be. This commercial development accompanied new residential subdivisions of brick bungalows being built on former farmland west of the original village in the mid-1950s. The plaza, still doing very well after over sixty years, and the neighbourhood in behind, is the "ground zero" of Markham Village's post-World War II suburban transformation. The process of building and re-building continues, and this neighbourhood is presently undergoing a new transformation as larger, upscale custom homes are replacing the modest bungalows of the 50s.

**October 9 – Thanksgiving Weekend.** This morning I walked down to the Farmers' Market at Robinson and Main, to see if the vendor with the soup mixes was there. The musical entertainment was just getting set up as I walked through the market to see the stalls that had been set up for the day and what they had to offer. There were more hot-food vendors at the market than the last time I visited. There were people selling pies for Thanksgiving, honey, hot sauce, jams, hand-crafter pottery and an extra-large stall brimming with fresh vegetables. The market was a little quiet as it was still early. Did I find the vendor with the soup mixes? I went around the stalls two times but did not see her. Next time I will ask the market manager to see if the soup mix vendor is there only on certain days, but that will have to wait until next year, because this was the last day for the Farmers' Market this season.

On the way home, my wife and I passed by Crafty Pots, a shop where you can paint your own unglazed ceramics. This year I'd like to have a ceramic jack-o-lantern for our Halloween candy table – self-serve again due to the on-going COVID-19 situation. The candy table worked well for us last year. I think I've carved one too many gooey pumpkins at this point – but who knows? Maybe at some point I'll get back to pumpkin carving again.

**October 10 –** Rain overnight gave way to a bright morning. Above-seasonal temperatures are forecast for the coming week. What an October we've had so far. On my way to Tanney Pond Park, I passed the row of Late Victorian-style townhouses at 15-37 Bullock Drive that were constructed on land severed from the rear yard of 180 Main Street North in the 1990s. With their bay-and-gables design, red brick with buff brick trim, and segmentally-arched windows, the architecture of these townhouses echoes that of Markham Village of the 1870s and 1880s, without literally copying an exact historical style. This traditional design fits seamlessly into the character of old Markham Village. The development was the product of a willing property owner working with the Heritage Conservation District Plan and the municipality, and has often been cited as a great example of how to successfully do infill projects in a heritage conservation district. There's another good example of infill in a period style at 15-29 Water Street, not far from this location. This smaller development of townhouses, constructed in the late 2010s, has a design inspired by the mansard-roofed, Second

Empire style row houses on Wilson Street. The details of the Water Street townhouses are more abstracted than the Bullock Drive townhouses, but they still fit very well into the village context.

This morning, mid-morning, the pathways and boardwalk of Tannery Pond Park were quiet, with only a couple of other walkers besides myself, and not too many birds. In places, leaves are starting to fall and scatter upon the walkways. Robinson Creek is fast-flowing and cheerfully noisy as it flows over and around the stones and boulders in its bed, especially where its route tightly curves past the bridge and the remnants of the old dam. From the raised boardwalk I observed a busy chipmunk moving from branch to branch in a small tree next to the railing, very close to me, only inches away, seemingly unworried by my presence. He didn't chitter at me at all, he just went about his business. Just as I was coming the end of the boardwalk, I saw a couple of cardinals streak by, and a black squirrel next to the boardwalk, almost as close to the railing as the chipmunk was.

**October 11 – Canadian Thanksgiving.** Thanksgiving Day has been a statutory holiday on the second Monday in October since January 31, 1957 when it was proclaimed by Canada's governor-general.<sup>12</sup> Canadian Thanksgiving occurs earlier in the fall than American Thanksgiving, which happens in November. I've always thought that American Thanksgiving was too close to winter and Christmas. These Thanksgiving holidays hearken back to the ancient harvest festivals of Britain and Continental Europe – a very old tradition. In our household, we usually celebrate with a turkey dinner on the Sunday of the long weekend, but this year, to accommodate everyone's schedule, we had the dinner on Saturday. It must have been good because there were no left-overs.

Went for a walk in Springdale Park just before lunch today, and another walker pointed out patches of very large toadstools amongst the trees. They had saucer-shaped heads, with a few of them reaching about five inches in diameter. There were other mushrooms around as well, a kind I believe is called "Shaggy Mane." My maternal grandfather was quite a wild mushroom enthusiast, and I remember him saying that they were edible. It must be the right time of year for all these mushrooms and toadstools to make their showy appearance. A high of 24 degrees, with some humidity in the air was forecast for today. As I wrote this, the temperature was 22 degrees. An exceptional Thanksgiving Day, with sunshine and a few clouds.

**October 12 –** Yet another warm, sunny day with above-seasonal temperatures. Large walnuts in their green husks were dropping from the majestic pair of black walnut trees in the front yard of 9 Peter Street this morning, which I observed as I walked our dog. When the walnuts hit the sidewalk or road, they hit with quite a heavy "thunk" sound that made me realize that walking beneath the canopy of these trees could result in a painful blow from one of them. A neighbour, Allison, said yesterday that she thought the walnuts were larger than usual this year, and I agreed. We talked about the mess the

walnuts make when the break open, and there is brown-black staining and debris scattered below them. "But they're a native tree so we have to protect them," she said.

**October 13** – Over the past few days I've been looking at photographs of some late nineteenth century barns in the Town of Caledon, to provide some comments for Sally Drummond, the staff person that looks after heritage in that town. These barns are being researched for potential designation under the *Ontario Heritage Act*, and she knows that I have done a fair amount of research into Ontario barns, so that is why I've been consulted. This got me thinking about the last full-size barn to survive in the area around Markham Village, and that was in Mount Joy. There are still some stables or "town barns" in this area, in the rear yards of houses on Main Street and Peter Street, but they are not agricultural barns in the true sense. The barn that I remember was on a remnant of the Reesor-Grove farm on the north side of Sixteenth Avenue, east of Williamson Road. Today, the mid-nineteenth century Mennonite Georgian farmhouse built by John L. Reesor is the centrepiece of a townhouse complex. It elegantly marks the site of the former farmstead, along with some large, old trees that were preserved. When I had the opportunity to visit the property about 2010, before it was sold for development, the barn was standing but heavily shrouded in trees and overgrown shrubs. It had not been in use for many years and was becoming unsafe. It was difficult to get a good look at the old barn for these reasons. What I recall is a gambrel-roofed barn from the early 1900s. If an older structure was contained within the barn, I could not find out since the building could not be entered. The barn was demolished or dismantled without the opportunity to document it.

I've noticed that the blooms of native flowering plants like asters and goldenrod are now fading away from the wilder parts of our local landscape as the fall season progresses. The gold and purple in fields and along pathways has become noticeably reduced, but more colour is on the way. Next will come the earthy colours of autumn leaves, which have started to change, depending on the kind of tree. Warmer than usual temperatures have allowed our annuals to hang on a little longer, with zinnias, snapdragons and geraniums still in colourful bloom, at least until the first frost of the season hits them.

**October 14** – The first half of the day was warm and sunny, with a light breeze blowing. The sky clouded over after lunch. Looking again at wildflowers, I did manage to find some blue chicory, which for years I have called "cornflowers" in error, along the railway line. I saw a few purple asters near the Snider entrance to Cedar Valley Park. These ones have many spent blooms. Most of the goldenrod in the same area has gone to bronze. Another plant I noticed was a few Queen Anne's lace, still white and therefore lace-like, also some bright yellow dandelions blooming late. Walking up Main from Beech Street this morning, I took note of how the architectural character of the east side of the street contrasts with that of the west, particularly in the area a little to the north of the railway crossing. This is where Mount Joy begins. There are older houses dating from the mid to late-nineteenth century on the west side of Main Street,

indicating that the owners of farms in the 7<sup>th</sup> Concession were inclined to sell off or subdivide their Main Street frontages before their neighbours on the east side, in the 8<sup>th</sup> Concession. Most of the older houses on the west side of the street display the picturesque architecture of the Late Victorian period, while those on the east side follow the simplified and compact designs of the Edwardian period. There are some exceptions to this observation. As you get closer to Sixteenth Avenue, on the east side of Main Street, several examples of the Ontario Gothic Cottage were constructed on a few lots created on the John H. "Deer Park" Ramer farm by Jonas Ramer in 1891.

**October 15** - A couple of weeks ago I noticed that new banners had been put up on the street light poles on Main Street. These banners honour people with military service, mainly during the Second World War, and have been installed during the lead-up to Remembrance Day. I saw a few Markham names among the many people being recognized. I decided to take advantage of the warm spell we've been having to walk down the street and take down the names and accompanying information on each banner. Today, I covered the area of Bullock Drive down to Robinson Street. In my travels I ran into Gunter Langhorst, a member of the Markham Historical Society. We were chatting about the banners and how the names had likely been put forward by the people sponsoring them. Gunter was also interested in reading the names on the banners, and knew about some of them or their families. I'll take down the names on the banners south of Robinson Street on another day. This is what I have so far, copied *verbatim*:

Jack Paley, Parachute Regiment, WW II  
Stan Hems, 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry, WW II  
Thomas Hope, Lanark & Renfrew Scottish Regiment  
John Wilbert Walsh, Queen's Own Rifles, Army, WW II  
Boden R. J. Wilson, Gunner, 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Medium Regiment, Canadian Army, WW II  
Sgt. John Milligan, RCAF, WW II  
Sgt. John "Jack" Stuart, Army, WW II  
F/L Robert Joffre Leet, DFM, 103 Squadron, RCAF, Bomber Command, 1940-1945  
Cliff Wootton, RAF, WW II  
A. B. Gerald Lillie, Royal Canadian Navy, WW II  
Wm. Donald Rattle, RCAF Bomber Squadron, WW II  
John William Morison, Toronto Scottish Regiment  
The Jarrick's: Dorothy, Army; Howard, RCAF, WW II  
L. Cpl. Joseph Glover, Royal Regiment of Canada, WW II  
Charles Jordon, Corporal, RAF (UK) 1939-1945  
William France, Royal Canadian Navy, WW II  
William J. Green, RCN, WW II  
Thomas P. Keeble, Army, WW II  
Thomas B. Desson II, Royal Canadian Navy, WW II  
Norman Jack Fortnum, Navy, WW II  
Alexander Lawrie, Army, WW I

William Herbert (Herb) Tracey, 1923-2017, Canadian Armoured Division, WW II  
Ernest L. Prosser, Navigator, Air Force  
Walter Stanley Charles Rudolph, Canadian Army Special Forces, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion,  
Royal Dog Company, 1950-1952  
Job Lawton, British Army, L. N., WW I  
Sergeant Major Charles Mullett and Daughter Private Dorothy Mullett, Army, WW II

**October 16** – A rainy day was forecast to follow a rainy night. Even so, the morning was damp but there was no rainfall, so Bailey got two walks in. The day continued blustery, with wind gusts from the west up to 50 kilometers per hour. In terms of rain, there was only a light shower in the early afternoon. A high of 14 degrees. On the trees where the leaves have changed colour, many leaves were brought down by the night-time wind and rain. There is now no doubt that we are in the fall season. This morning, from my kitchen window I observed two “V” formations of Canada geese fly by – but they were headed north, not south. On another day, last week I saw large gatherings of geese on a farm field north of our area, and also on the surface of a large pond near Stouffville. I’m not sure when the Canada geese that choose to fly south for the winter actually begin to do that.

**October 17** – The Old Presbyterian Manse at 89 Main Street South is the first historical landmark to be seen when coming into Markham Village from the south. The white-painted, two-storey brick residence sits very close to the corner of Main Street and James Scott Road. The first thing you see is an ornate, wrought-iron gate and fence on the street frontage. The most prominent section of the gable-fronted house is the south part, constructed in the Classic Revival style *circa* 1862 as an addition to an older, single storey brick cottage. This older part of the building was built in 1840, according to census records, and was first occupied by Reverend David Youmans, an early Methodist preacher of some renown. When the manse was enlarged in the early 1860s, the brick cottage became the kitchen wing. From about 1853 to 1884, ministers serving the Presbyterian Church lived here. In 1884, a new manse was constructed at 44 Church Street, a location a little more convenient to the second St. Andrew’s Church on Washington Street. Now the ministers would not have to walk through the Rouge River valley and up the hill to church on Sunday morning. After the old manse was sold, a later owner divided it into two dwelling units, and it stayed that way until 1942 when Charles Chambers restored it back to a single residence. The local folklore about this part of the building’s history is a little muddled because there is the idea that one part of the house was physically moved up next to the other part. Chambers renovated the old house in the Colonial Revival style, which was in vogue at the time. The impressive wood door surround that faces Main Street was added during these renovations as an enhancement to this simple village residence that marks the southern end of the Vinegar Hill neighbourhood. The current, long-time owners, Peter and Yvette Ross, are very proud of their fine old house and take great care to maintain its historical character.



**October 18** – The John Reesor House was another historical landmark in the same area as the Old Presbyterian Manse. It was located on the east side of Markham Road, a little to the south of Vinegar Hill. The Reesor House was built in 1853. It was one of several elegant, two-storey brick residences designed in a similar style, essentially in the dignified Georgian architectural tradition, but made exceptional for their Gothicised Palladian windows topped by shallow gables on the second floor, over the main entranceway. Houses of this type were built in Markham, Scarborough and Pickering Townships, and their similarities suggest the work of a single builder or designer whose name has been lost to history. The only surviving examples of this distinctive house design that I know of are the Thomas House at 14 David Gohn Circle, Markham Heritage Estates, and the Bentley House at Brock Road and Highway 7 in Brougham. In the files of the City of Markham there is an undated newspaper clipping that describes the history and architecture of the John Reesor House, and notes that at the time of writing, there was an antique store on the property called “Canadian Homestead Antiques.” I think this clipping probably dates to the 1970s when there was a growing public interest in Canadiana, particularly country pine furniture like harvest tables and corner cupboards. Unfortunately, the John Reesor House is a lost historical landmark, demolished after the property was expropriated for the route of Highway 407. This house was demolished early in the process of clearing the path for the future highway. Had it survived longer, it may have found its way into Markham Heritage Estates, or been relocated and restored at another location, as was the happy fate of the Delos Crosby House that once stood across the road and now forms the street-facing end unit of a row of townhouses at 33 Rougehaven Drive.

**October 19** – Speaking of Vinegar Hill, it’s the southernmost part of the Markham Village Heritage Conservation District. I’m not certain when this area was first referred to by this name, or if the name can really be considered official. I tend to think Vinegar Hill is an informal place name. I’ve read several versions of how people believe the name originated, none of which are fully convincing to me. The “Hill” seems to refer to the southernmost edge of the Rouge River Valley, where Rouge Street is found. Some people call this neighbourhood “Vinegar Dip,” referring to the valley itself and how Main Street dips as it passes through it. Vinegar Hill may have something to do with historical apple orchards and cider production in this part of the village. The most recent theory being promoted by people who like to muse about this kind of question links this Markham place name to an historic battle in Ireland during the Irish Rebellion of 1798. The Battle of Vinegar Hill in County Wexford was fought between the United Irishmen and British troops.<sup>13</sup> The United Irishmen were defeated. In Markham’s Vinegar Hill, census data tells us that there were many Irish Catholic labourers and tradesmen living close to the mills and other industries in the valley and village. Since the United Irishmen were not victorious at Vinegar Hill, it seems unlikely that this would have been an event the Irish of Markham Village would have wanted to commemorate, so if the name “Vinegar Hill” is indeed linked to this battle, I wonder who gave the name to this neighbourhood? Today, the early Irish Catholic families of the village are remembered by their monuments in the historic cemetery on Rouge

Street, the site of St. Patrick's Catholic Church from 1855 to 1977. A new St. Patrick's was built on the south side of Highway 7 in 1971.

**October 20** – Temperatures of 20 or 21 degrees were forecast for today, but some periods of cloud cover stalled the temperature at 17 until late in the afternoon, when it reached 19. This may be the last of the really warm days for the season, but we'll see if we get an "Indian summer" after the first frost. Halloween decorations have started to appear on store shelves and on the streets. I've noticed a number of those large, colourful inflatable displays on the front lawns of several homes and businesses in the area. Decorating for Halloween has become a big thing, with many owners going well beyond a simple jack-o-lantern carved from an orange pumpkin. Some choose decorations that I think are rather too macabre. Because our old house has a mansard-roofed tower similar to the image of a classic haunted mansion, we don't do much in the way of Halloween decorations because we don't want people to think of our house as a haunted house (no, there are no ghosts here). This year's jack-o-lantern will be a ceramic one, and we'll have a self-serve trick-or-treat table out near the street.

**October 21** – Mild today, with an overcast sky. A good day to revisit the Remembrance Day banners on Main Street before it gets cold. With rain forecast for the afternoon, it seemed like a good idea to get started early. This set of banners are mounted on the light poles between Highway 7 and Robinson Street. Again, I knew a few Markham names among the many people recognized for their military service. Maybe it was the dullness and dampness of the day or the more evident signs of fall that made me feel a sense of sadness and loss when I looked at the photographic portraits of those who served, and have likely passed on by now. The banners don't tell us what happened to the people being honoured. Most were pictured in their uniforms, with proud but serious expressions on their faces.

Harry Blaylock, 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders of Canada  
Harold C. Lawrie, Army, WW II  
Lucien Zappa, Royal Canadian Navy, HMCS Saguenay, WW II  
Dennis John Carlsen, Royal Canadian Air Force, WW II, '39 – '47  
John G. (Jack) Bradley, S. Fd. Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery  
William Calbert, Queen's Own Rifles of Canada  
Herbert Calbert, Queen's Own Rifles of Canada  
Pte. George Couperthwaite, Army, WW II  
Samuel Curry, British Army, West Africa  
Gordon Cole, Merchant Marines, WW II  
James L. Bacon, G.G.H.G., WW II  
Joan Mary Carlsen, Royal Air Force, WW II, '41 – '47  
Michael Cubit, Royal Marines  
Pte. Carleton Couperthwaite, WW I  
Ralph K. Chalmers, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Royal Regiment of Canada  
Sgt. Pilot Alfred V. Roffey, RCAF, WW II

Roy Alexander Walker, Royal Regiment of Canada, WW II  
Fred Lawton Wolstenholme, Irish Regiment of Canada  
Cpl. Walter Purdy, Royal Regiment of Canada, WW II  
Sgt. Brian Webb, British Army, Suez Canal Zone, Egypt, 1953 – 1956  
Ernie Thompson, Royal Canadian Navy  
Cpl. Nicholas Webb, C. D., RSM, Royal Regiment of Canada, 1977 – 2018  
Major John D. Watson, Army, WW II  
Murray Ross, RCAF Navigator, 166 Squadron, WW II  
Herbert Proctor, #799578, Cdn. Inf. Vimy, France, d. April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1917, age 35  
George Clifford Woodruff, Queen's Own Rifles of Canada  
Pte. James K. Kearns, Army, WW I  
John France, RCAF, WW II  
Corporal John Leslie Harris M.M., Royal Canadian Regiment, Armoured Corps,  
11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment

**October 22** – A cool, bright day with a high of 7 degrees. You really feel the cold during these transitional days in the season, until you get climatized to it. Work has started on renovations and a major addition to 1 Peter Street, the old house on the corner of Peter and Beech Streets. It's right across the road from us. This brick village residence in the Queen Anne Revival style was built *circa* 1895 for retired farmers Joseph and Elizabeth Pipher. They moved to Mount Joy from a farm on the west side of what is now known as McCowan Road, not far from today's Markham Fairgrounds. This rural community was then and still is known as Peaches after the Methodist chapel at the corner of McCowan Road and Elgin Mills Road. The Pipher family was part of Markham's Pennsylvania-German community, as were many of the residents they joined on Peter Street. It's good to see owners investing in historical houses in the heritage district. With substantial, but well-designed additions, these houses, modest in size for their time, are brought up to current standards. Along the way, some restoration work typically gets done as well. This helps protect heritage properties from the possibility of future redevelopment. The Pipher House is richly adorned with coloured leaded glass transom lights and decorative woodwork in its south gable. I believe that this large gable, fronting on Beech Street, once had additional ornamentation that was removed at some point in time. I base that idea on the lighter tone of the brick on the wall below the gable peak, an indication that the brick was protected from weathering in that area for many years.

**October 23** – Another classic fall day, much like yesterday. This is the weekend to start taking in the outdoor furniture and shut off the outside water taps. Time to take down the peony rings and find a safe place to store them. An appointment has been made at the dealership to switch the summer tires to winter tires on the car next week, as there are reports of an early onset of wintry weather conditions in the news again. If the *Farmer's Almanac* is correct in its weather forecast for Southern Ontario, this may be true. We'll see. While in the garage this afternoon, I noted the snow shovels in the back

corner, and after thinking about it for a moment, took them out of the garage and placed them by the back door. Just in case.

**October 24** – Fred Robbins was in touch with me lately about the location where Group of 7 artist A. J. Casson painted a street scene titled “In the Village of Markham,” in 1933. I knew the answer right away because I have seen a version of this watercolour in a coffee-table book, *A. J. Casson – My Favourite Watercolours 1919 to 1957*, published by Prentice-Hall in 1982. In the book, the painting is titled “Markham, 1935.” The view is looking north on Water Street, toward Wilson Street, on the west side of Markham Village. On the left is the rear of a block of rowhouses in the Second Empire style that front on Wilson Street; in the centre is a two-storey, general store on the north side of Wilson Street; and on the right are some sheds that once stood at the rear of Charles Beierl’s cabinet-maker’s shop and other businesses that fronted on Main Street. I thought at first that the store was Wilson’s Variety Hall, but the details don’t match the building as restored at the Markham Museum. More importantly, the view is not quite right, because a store never stood in this location. Casson placed it there for artistic effect. In his notes on this painting, included in *My Favourite Watercolours*, the artist said the store was still standing in 1982. – but where? The story gets more interesting. In his research, Fred found an earlier version of this painting titled “In the Village of Markham,” dated 1933. That painting shows the view as it really was, with the right-hand side of Charles and Maria Carlton’s Gothic Revival residence at the top of Water Street. The house at 12 Wilson Street, built *circa* 1875, is still standing, but as a mostly reconstructed heritage building within the Markham Village Lanes commercial development. After speaking with me, Fred went over to Water Street and took a photograph of the same location as it appears today, from the same vantage point where A. J. Casson would have stood in 1933. The absence of the sheds on the right-hand side of Water Street was the most noteworthy change to the present-day view of this little corner of backstreets in Markham Village. This afternoon, I also went by for a fresh look at the location after I saw the earlier version of the painting. Comparing the watercolours of 1933 and 1935, I have to admit that Casson’s use of “artistic license” did make for a more compelling, if less factual, work of art.

A picture-perfect fall day, with the sun shining and just a hint of coolness in the air. More colour in the leaves.

**October 25** – A cold, wet morning. There’s a chilly wind blowing from the north-east. It’s not a pleasant day to be outside, and it’s gloomy inside. The rain is supposed to last all day, and maybe will extend into tomorrow. This seems like an appropriate opportunity to write about ghost stories, as Halloween approaches. I’m always interested to hear about this kind of local folklore, and being in the field of historical buildings, I have been told many accounts of strange happenings through the years. In York Region, quite a few of these stories come from Richmond Hill and vicinity and have been recorded in the files of the municipal heritage committee. In the case of our community, Markham Village doesn’t seem to have a rich legacy of tales of the

supernatural. I know of only three allegedly haunted houses in the local area, but the details are vague. Certainly not enough substance to hold a “ghost walk” like the ones they do in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Kingston, and Ottawa. I suppose it is possible that Markham Village may have more ghost stories and other odd tales, but if that is so, people have decided to keep them to themselves, so there’s not much to write about on this topic.

**October 26** – I woke up to grey skies and drizzly rain. A cold wind was blowing from the north-west. More trees have had their leaves change colour and then drop in a series of rainy, windy days and nights we’ve had, but for the most part, the deciduous trees around here have remained green a little longer than usual, it seems to me. I’m starting to notice more commuter cars parked in the GO station parking lot. Some people are now using the parking lot on the east side of Main Street too. This is an indication that at least some downtown offices are beginning to allow their employees to come back, perhaps on a part-time basis while they still work from home for a portion of their work hours. I recently heard that although the Markham Civic Centre is not officially open, selected departments now have staff in attendance on a daily basis.

**October 27** – Today the temperature reached 16 degrees, warmer than usual for this late in October, accompanied by sunny skies. A really exceptional fall day. Driving through the Robinson neighbourhood today, I took particular notice of how many new houses have replaced the original bungalows of the mid-1950s. A bungalow on the west side of Galsworthy Drive, opposite James Robinson Public School, was in the process of being demolished as I passed by this morning. After a property is sold, the first sign that an existing house will disappear and be replaced with a new one is the installation of tree protection fencing. The fencing goes up a few weeks or even months prior to demolition, with the intent to protect and preserve mature trees where possible. The pace of house replacement has increased lately in this first post-World War II subdivision in Markham Village. There are now continuous rows of large, two-storey brick and stone custom homes in certain places, rather than the odd new replacement house set among the existing bungalows. The 1950s character of this older neighbourhood has reached a point of change where there is no return. The older development represents a different kind of lifestyle, which I see as more family-oriented and somehow less materialistic, while the new development, to me, represents conspicuous consumption.

In the late afternoon, I walked the pathway around the wetland in Cedar Valley Park. The sun was getting low in the sky, bathing everything it touched in a soft, golden light. Dave Wylie and his crew were packing up after dismantling two of the three timber arches in the parkette at Marmill Way. The wood, salvaged from Reesor’s Marmill that once stood on this site, was in a state of decay. One of the arches had already been replicated with matching material earlier this year.

**October 28** – Another exceptionally fine late October day, cooler than yesterday but still bright and beautiful. A cold wind came up in the afternoon, making it less comfortable to be outside. Mid-morning, I visited Doug and Jean Denby at their historic house in Unionville, the James Eckardt House, *circa* 1875. I often refer to Doug as the Unionville historian, but he styles himself a “commentator on history.” He’s an excellent story-teller and enjoys presenting alternative interpretations of things that are commonly accepted as the last word on any given subject. We talked about diverse topics of mutual interest: how the renovation of the Philip Eckardt Log House has turned out, plank-on-plank construction; the origin of the Berczy settlers, the proclamations of King George III, who Doug calls “Farmer George of Hanover,” and more.

An addendum to my notes of October 25: Just yesterday, I heard from one of my sons about a haunted apartment above a commercial establishment on Main Street. I’ll keep the exact location private. A former tenant of this apartment told him about hearing the sound of footsteps on the floor in middle of the night and about rattling window shutters that stopped moving when sternly spoken to. Reader, make of it what you will.

**October 29** – A cool and cloudy day. This morning I drove by the impressive old house at 180 Main Street North, which has recently undergone a lengthy programme of renovation and restoration work. This is a house that gets noticed, even by people that don’t have the inclination to look at and admire old houses. As in the case of the Wedding Cake House, this house at the north end of the village is architecturally unique and a challenge to classify into any specific style category. It is a tall house in red brick, with steep side gables richly decorated with ornate bargeboards that reflects the Queen Anne Revival style of the 1880s. A deep, heavily-proportioned, early twentieth century verandah with a small sunroom centred over the main entrance is the dominant feature of the façade, supported on stout Tuscan columns that seem too robust for the scale of the building. A gable with a Gothic window in coloured leaded glass caps the sunroom, and contrasts with the Edwardian Classical character of the verandah. It’s a truly eclectic architectural conversation piece that greatly benefited from having the white paint removed from its brick walls a number of years ago. It seems that such a remarkable house must have a remarkable history, and it does. It began as a one-storey brick cottage built *circa* 1855. It may have been a hipped-roofed Ontario Cottage, but this is not known for certain. From 1857 to 1862, it was the home of Chester F. Hall, a carriage maker whose factory and first house stood across the road, a little to the south. When Hall decided to try to expand his business with a factory in Toronto, he sold this property to Dr. Thomas McCausland. The doctor had his home and practice here for 10 years. After that, a prominent local druggist, William Mason, purchased the property in 1872. His drug store was located at 114 Main Street. That building is still standing and has undergone some façade restoration too. It was under the Mason family’s many years of ownership that the house at 180 Main Street North was increased in grandeur and received its architectural embellishments, probably in stages. A noteworthy landmark at the south-west corner of Main Street and Bullock Drive.

**October 30** – A dull day, not as rainy as it was forecast to be. It was the last day of the season for Reesor’s Farm Market on Ninth Line. Hopefully, anyone who wanted a nicely-shaped pumpkin to carve or otherwise display has purchased one by now. Many more leaves have fallen with last night’s wind and rain, but quite a few trees still have green leaves destined to fall later. We haven’t started raking and bagging yet. Our “Canada 150” sugar maple, planted in 2017, is just starting to change from bright green to yellow-orange. I noted that poppies are now being displayed as Remembrance Day gets closer. Last night I saw a house in the Armstrong neighbourhood with Christmas lights lit up. A nice display, if a little early, but then I have seen Christmas decorations on display for sale at a few stores. The W Network has started its run of romantic Christmas-themed movies, so the lead-up to December 25<sup>th</sup> is well underway.

**October 31 – All Hallows’ Eve**, otherwise known as Halloween. The former term, as it is marked on the October pages of the *Farmer’s Almanac*, sounds more ancient and atmospheric to me than the modern name. In Markham, in the afternoon, the temperature reached 15 degrees, and there were generous periods of sun and cloud, which made for a glorious walk through Cedar Valley Park. At intervals, sunlight was shining on the autumn leaves on the trees and on those strewn along the path by a brisk west wind that was blowing. The *Farmer’s Almanac* had predicted cold temperatures and possible snow showers, but the weather did not turn out that way, so it was a better than average night for Halloween. The first trick-or-treaters were out just before 6 p.m., when we were just getting our self-serve table set up at the street. After a slow start, groups of children, many accompanied by their parents, were out on the street going door-to-door. Our final tally was 81 visitors, based on a count of how many chip bags we had left. If some people took more than one bag of chips (we had two different kinds), then the number would have been a bit lower. The porch light and jack-o-lantern went off at 8 o’clock. By then Peter Street had quietened down, and Halloween was done for another year. It was a good time, sitting out of the wind on the front porch, watching all the activity and happy sounds.

**November 1** – In the morning, I had a visit from John Bayfield and his wife, Norma. John is a fellow fossil collector and a long-time volunteer researcher at the Markham Museum. We have collected from some of the same localities in Ontario, so it has been interesting to compare our fossil specimens. We have a mini-museum in our living room, with fossil specimens, mineral specimens and modern-day sea shells. Our display is more modest, I am sure, than the remarkable museum that once existed at Chateau Ferrier, but I feel a type of kinship with Mount Joy’s past by also hosting a private museum in our home.

This afternoon, instead of pursuing matters of nature or history, I walked up to Old Sixteenth Avenue just for the exercise, passing through the north end of the heritage district and then through the newer section of Peter Street where there is a mix of post-WW II houses and larger, newer residences. The sidewalk near 33 Peter Street takes

a gentle, curving path to the east to avoid a large, old silver maple. Our family calls the maple “turn-around tree” because it marks the limit of our longer walks with our 11-year-old Yorkshire terrier, Bailey. Colder today than it was yesterday, with a temperature of 10 degrees accompanied by strong 61 km/h wind gusts from the west. Ragged clouds in varying shades of grey, but with white edges, filled the western sky. The gusty wind noisily blew dry leaves around the street. They made rattling and scratching sounds that seemed to make it feel colder than it actually was. A few sunny breaks brought moments of relief. This is fall. Time to bring out a proper fall coat.

**November 2** – Writing indoors today on account of a wind chill of – 1 degree. Dramatic grey clouds with varying shades and bold textures that perfectly express the change of seasons were visible in the northern sky in the afternoon when I returned from a visit with Lorne Smith. At about 4 p.m. there was a brief hailstorm, or perhaps it was better described as sleet. Not long afterwards, the sun was out again.

Building on the story of Chester F. Hall from October 29, when I was writing about his period of ownership of 180 Main Street North: Hall was a native of Sherbrooke, Quebec. What it was that brought him to Markham Village is unknown, but in 1851 he bought a frame, gable-fronted house at the north end of the village from James Thomas, today addressed 171 Main Street North. He soon purchased additional land adjoining his residence to give him a full acre, and built what has been described as a “large carriage works” next door to the blacksmith shop of H. R. Wales.<sup>14</sup> Wales went on to become a prominent carriage maker himself. In addition to his manufacturing business, Chester F. Hall played an important role in the development of the community by creating Plan 180, a subdivision of village lots that included Markham Street, part of Church Street, and part of Joseph Street. He was a founding trustee of the local grammar school in 1858.<sup>15</sup> Hall’s enterprising spirit led him to establish a carriage factory in Toronto in 1862, which unfortunately was not successful. He lost his Markham Village carriage factory property to the mortgage-holder and moved to Rockford, Illinois, where he established a new carriage factory in partnership with a gentleman by the name of Moses Bartlett. The former Hall residence at 171 Main Street North became the home of a series of blacksmiths, who likely worked out of part of the old carriage works. There was a blacksmith in residence here until at least 1893. In more recent times, the old house was added to and then given a “mock Tudor” exterior, which masked its true age. Even more recently, the house has been shifted forward on the property and renovated once again. It now has a clapboard exterior that is more in keeping with its mid-nineteenth century date of construction.

**November 3** – This morning, there was frost on the vehicles in the driveway, and maybe even some traces on the shaded grass too. This was possibly the first frost of the season, though perhaps not a killing frost because some of our annuals still have healthy-looking blooms. I consulted the latest edition of the *Farmer’s Almanac* and it says that “Indian summer” typically occurs between November 11 (St. Martin’s Day) and November 20, so it’s too early in the month for this hoped-for warm spell to arrive any



time soon. The weather prediction in the same almanac predicts cold temperatures for this period. Now that I am aware of the dates, I will watch for the arrival of Indian summer, if it happens.

**November 4** – A cool and bright start to the day. In the afternoon, the sky clouded over with the possibility of rain coming in from the west. There were male and female nuthatches at our bird feeder, selecting their favourite seeds and tossing aside the others. Our flowers don't look as good as they did yesterday; a sign that the cold is deepening. This morning, I picked up a poppy at the Village Grocer and pinned it to my jacket. This seemed a fitting day to record the names on some additional Remembrance Day banners I spotted on Main Street, south of Highway 7 last weekend. When I took note of the banners in the core of Markham Village, I didn't realize they were also in the area south of Highway 7, which doesn't get as much foot traffic as the business district. I waited until the temperature warmed up a bit before I ventured out with my notebook in hand. This group of banners honoured the following people:

George Robbins, Warrant Officer, Royal Army Service Corps, WW II.  
Annie France, USAR, WW II  
S Lt. Arnold Brown, RCNVR, WW II  
Lt. William Rattle, Army, WW I  
Cpl. James Rattle, Army, WW I  
William (Bill) Sutton, 1<sup>st</sup> Hussars, WW II  
Pte. James Robinson, WW I  
Gilbert Bazinet, Army, WW II  
Sgt. Charles Dowds, Dunkirk Veteran, WW II, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ulster A. A. Regiment, British Army  
Frederick Norris, Flt. Sgt. RCAF, WW II  
C. H. "Smokey" Stover, DFC, 414 Squadron Leader, RCAF, WW II  
Edward B. Gillespie, Flt. Sgt. RCAF, 160 Squadron, WW I  
Cpl. Frederick E. King, WW I, 4<sup>th</sup> Cdn. Div., 85<sup>th</sup> Bn., Nova Scotia Highlanders

**November 5** – Definite frost on the grass and on rooftops this morning. There is a noticeable change in the environment from yesterday. You can see it in the plants. A deeper cold has arrived, and more leaves are gently falling from the trees, particularly the maples and the oaks. In the absence of wind and rain to blow them down, they peacefully drop in little bunches and you can hear a soft, whispering sound as they join the leaves that already carpet the earth beneath the trees. The sunshine illuminates their autumn colours, a truly beautiful sight as nature begins to put the green world to rest for the year. My son, James, and I saw a couple of bluejays at the Cedar Valley wetlands this morning, and numerous, busy black squirrels. We also saw some chickadees along an overgrown fence line next to the GO Station parking lot. Today I took special notice of several large, black basalt boulders in our area. In geological terms, they are called "glacial erratics." There is one alongside the railway line south of the train station, one on the north side of Station Street just outside the Marmill Way townhouse community, and another on the west side of Cedar Valley Park. Have they remained undisturbed in

the same places where they were dropped by retreating glaciers during the last Ice Age? Basalt is a dense volcanic rock, very heavy, and very hard to break up. I believe these boulders have not moved far from where they were originally deposited during the late glacial period in North America, about 12,000 to 10,000 years ago, if they have moved at all. I think it is possible that the early community builders of our village found it easier to leave them in place and work around them.

**November 6** – Today was the first of several days of mild weather with temperatures predicted to range from 11 to 14 degrees. An early Indian summer? I was reminded of a funny story that took place a few years ago. I was exiting the Markham Civic Centre on a warm work day in the fall with a colleague who had emigrated from Hyderabad, India. As we walked out the door, I said that it felt like Indian summer. To this, Lam replied “Oh, no George, summer in India is much, much hotter.” I explained to him what our Indian summer was all about and we had a laugh about it.

In the morning, Linda and I went to Port Perry to visit Peter and Lisa Wokral, who are in the process of renovating their 1870s Italianate house. Peter and I worked together in the Heritage Section of Markham’s Planning and Urban Design Department before I retired in 2020. On this visit, we wanted to see how the work was progressing. They are restoring some elements of their old house that have been removed or altered over the years when the building had been divided into apartments. It takes a special appreciation of period architecture to invest in a high level of historic restoration like what is being done here. As in the case of our restoration of the exterior of 4 Peter Street, this restoration has been guided by the fortunate existence of archival photographs that show the Wokrals’ house in its original condition. I’m hoping we’ll see more of this kind of thing in Markham Village. Maybe some people will be inspired by our restoration work.

**November 7** – Today we are back to standard time, as daylight savings time ended a little after midnight. The high today reached 16 degrees, exceeding the temperature that was forecast. It feels like 18 degrees, according to the weather report on TV. In the morning I was surprised by how much traffic there was on Main Street. In the afternoon, there were many people out walking, some with dogs, some without, but all taking advantage of an exceptionally warm November day. By now there were enough leaves on our lawn to motivate us to begin raking and bagging. There was the pleasant smell of wood smoke in the air. I enjoy the quiet rhythm of raking and the feeling of satisfaction of gathering up the dry leaves the old-fashioned way – so much better than the noisy leaf-blowers that some people prefer to use. It was warm enough to work outside without a jacket, even before lunch time. There’s still a lot of leaves left to come down, so this pleasant chore will have to be repeated on another day.

**November 8** – A high of 17 degrees today, sunny, with a gentle breeze. This was the best weather day of the warm spell, according to the forecast. In Toronto, the temperature reached 18 degrees in the mid-afternoon. A good day for walking. In the morning I

walked in the Rouge Valley in Unionville with Doug Denby, who helped me to differentiate which watercourse was the Rouge and which was Bruce's Creek. We talked about the Eckardt sawmill that was on the Rouge north of today's Highway 7 and the difficulties associated with trying to pinpoint its former location. It operated until the 1860s. Doug spoke about how high the water gets in the valley in the spring some years, even flowing over the foot bridges. He also noted how the building of the railway line across the valley in the 1870s altered the flow of water in the area. We noted that milkweed pods are open and spreading their seeds on the white fluff children used to call "Santa Clauses" when I was a boy. Doug also commented on the goldenrod plants next to the pathway, which he says were once required to be cut down by law, but later found not to cause hay fever as was once thought.

In the afternoon, wanting to take full advantage of what felt like a day in late summer, I walked through Cedar Valley with Fred Robbins. Fred was visiting to show me what he believes is the oldest group photograph of the membership of the York Pioneer and Historical Society, which he found in the society's archives. It was taken before 1878, based on a member being in the photo that had passed away by that year. Most of the members of the society sported the abundant facial hair of the time period, with great bushy beards and moustaches.

**November 9** - Cooler and cloudier than yesterday, but still mild. Light rain in the afternoon. Fred Robbins showed me a bucketful of shiny reddish-brown chestnuts he had recently gathered on the grounds of historic Scadding Cabin at Exhibition Place. I recall Lorne Smith saying that he played a game with chestnuts at the time when he attended the old high school in Markham Village. Years ago, chestnut trees were more common. The native American chestnut was mostly wiped out by a blight years ago, so the trees that are still around are a European variety called "horse chestnut." There's a few around the village, but not many. One example is in front of 183 Main Street North. My father played "conkers," the same game as Lorne did, when he was a boy. A string was tied around each chestnut and there was a contest to see which player's chestnut would break apart when two were struck together with the use of the string to propel them. The game originated in the U.K. and is still played there.<sup>16</sup> I was surprised to find out that there have been championship games of conkers held with numerous spectators in attendance.

**November 10** - The drizzly rain of last evening had moved on by morning, making a bright start for another mild day. This week of mild weather was forecast in the latest edition of the *Farmer's Almanac*. I enjoy comparing the almanac predictions with the actual reality of the weather when it arrives. Sometimes, the forecasts are right, or at least *almost* right. Other times they are way off. It's all in good fun, as I approach it.

This morning I'm looking at the commercial building at 115-117 Main Street North, sometimes known as the Carleton Block, sometimes the Nighswander Block. It was built *circa* 1873 after the big fire of 1872, which destroyed a number of buildings in that

part of the village. It's an imposing, tall two-storey structure in the local reddish-orange brick used here in the mid to late nineteenth century. The red brick is accented with decorative trimmings in buff or "white" brick, as it was historically called. There are two storefronts with wide, curved-topped openings. The arches are mainly concealed behind modern signage, but you can see the ends from which the arches spring like brick rainbows. Above a bracketed canopy that protects the storefronts from the weather, there are four round-topped windows modelled after the Italianate style that was so prevalent in old Markham in the late nineteenth century. Until fairly recently, these windows were fitted with stock, flat-topped aluminum storm windows that required the round-arched upper portions to be covered in painted plywood. A commercial façade grant inspired the owner to have the windows restored to their original appearance by having new storm windows made that matched the shape of the openings. This building is an outstanding example of a heritage property that has been maintained in a way that both preserves and enhances its original character. Charles and Maria Carleton kept a general store in one of the units of the building until they moved to Toronto in the early 1880s. Next, George Walter Reesor had a grocery store in the northerly unit, followed by the Nighswander family, who were the owners from 1921 to 1969.

I headed home via the Tannery Pond boardwalk, where I encountered John Craig and a friend going for a morning walk. John lives on the site of the old Maple Leaf Woolen Mill. For a number of years, his family operated a wholesale bakery on Robinson Street. The bakery, established in the 1930s, was known for its malt bread.<sup>17</sup> There's an apartment building there now. As I continued on my walk past the Markham Village Senior's Activity Centre, I heard a band practicing inside, which I believe was the Markham Concert Band.

**November 11 - Remembrance Day** - The 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the poppy as a symbol of respect for those who served in Canada's military during the conflicts the country has seen. The day began grey, wet and blustery, more typical of mid-November than the brighter weather of the past few days. Fallen leaves are scattered across lawns and are gathered up along the curbside. There are more bare branches to be seen on the neighbourhood trees. The morning's sombre weather seemed in sympathy with the recognition of sacrifice and the sense of loss that Remembrance Day evokes. The sun began to shine through the thin cloud cover at about 10:00 a.m. A few minutes before 11:00, I joined a gathering of people of diverse ages and cultures, some in military uniform, in Veterans Square at Highway 7 and Main Street. There was a simple ceremony, with a minute of silence at 11:00, followed by the singing of "O Canada." Many in attendance respectfully placed their poppies upon the array of wreaths at the base of the new Cenotaph, then gradually dispersed. The inscription on the east side of the Cenotaph reads:

LEST WE FORGET  
IN HONOUR OF THOSE WHO SERVED  
IN REMEMBRANCE OF THOSE WHO FELL

AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN  
AND IN THE MORNING,  
WE WILL REMEMBER THEM.

The inscription on the west side of the Cenotaph reads:

THIS VETERANS SQUARE AND CENOTAPH  
ARE DEDICATED TO MARKHAM RESIDENTS  
WHO SERVED OUR COUNTRY VALIANTLY.

IN COMMEMORATION OF CANADA'S  
ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH YEAR  
OF CONFEDERATION.

DEDICATED JUNE 9, 2018

**November 12** – Looks like this will be the last mild day for a while. The sun is shining after a night of light rain showers. There's a fresh feel outdoors this morning. Mid-morning, I went for a walk through Cedar Valley Park, noticing how clear the sky was. Views through the wooded areas have really opened up with so many leaves having fallen by now. After lunch, the sky darkened, with large areas of slate-grey clouds threatening heavy rainfall, but after all of that drama in the sky, the dark clouds moved off to the east. Only a light shower fell locally in the midst of the troubled skies. I read yesterday's *Markham Economist & Sun* and learned that there had been a special Remembrance Day ceremony held at the Cenotaph on November 6. It was an invitation-only event designed to limit numbers due to continuing concerns with the pandemic. This was the ceremony that veterans attended, hosted by the Markham District Veterans Association. Christmas lights are beginning to become more commonly seen as we get further into November. I still have to put up our multi-coloured lights on our side porch, but the mini-light display by the front porch is ready to go. I think I will test it tonight.

**November 13-14** – It's turned colder this weekend, but not too cold yet. We've put up the rest of the outdoor Christmas lights. Our neighbour across the street, Jeffrey, was working on his display (much more elaborate than ours) and he remarked that it was good to get the decorations up before it snows. I agree, but so often we have waited until December, when the cold is more intense and snow has fallen or is falling.

Lorne Smith recently loaned me a box of research material on the subject of the history of Mennonite migration from Europe to the United States (while it was still the Thirteen Colonies) and Markham. The work was done by the late Carolyn Ballard, whose husband, Ron Brownsberger, comes from a Pennsylvania-German Mennonite lineage. Ms. Ballard traced 500 years of the history of her husband's family tree, beginning in 1400 and taking it up to more recent times when the family resided on Parkway Avenue in Markham Village. The research was done in four volumes, the first two prepared

while she was a student at Centennial College in 1979, and the third and fourth volumes while attending York University in 1984. Besides Brownsberger, the research includes many other Pennsylvania-German family names from Markham and Whitchurch-Stouffville: Reesor, Grove, Burkholder, Barkey, Hoover, Lehman, Fretz and Wambold, to name a few. Among Carolyn Ballard's research material, I found a brochure for an historic village in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania called Rittenhouse Town (there is a Rittenhouse in the Brownsberger family tree.) In this brochure it is stated that Wilhelm Rittenhausen/William Rittenhouse established the first paper mill in the Thirteen Colonies in 1690. The brochure goes on to say that he was one of the first Germans to come to America, and was the first Mennonite minister there as well. I had never before heard that William Rittenhouse was the first Mennonite minister in America. I checked the best Canadian source of information on the Pennsylvania-German Mennonites that I know, *The Trail of the Black Walnut*, by Dr. G. Elmore Reaman (1957) and saw similar information. Dr. Reaman wrote that William Rittenhouse arrived in Germantown, Pennsylvania in 1688 and was the first Mennonite minister in this first German community in America.<sup>18</sup>

Ms. Ballard's in-depth research led me to reflect on the extent to which the history and culture of the Pennsylvania German Mennonites is particularly relevant to the eastern part of Markham Township and Markham Village. Today, most of the old families have moved away from the village itself, but many still reside in the general vicinity. We still have Reesors, Burkholders and Ramers living locally. Evidence of this Pennsylvania-German heritage is most visible in street names in both older and newer neighbourhoods, and in the old houses, commercial buildings, churches, cemeteries that are the physical legacy of their community-building. As more historical buildings in the village receive plaques that reveal the names and occupations of the original builders, the influence of the Pennsylvania-Germans that helped establish the early community becomes more visible.

**November 15** - Last night a wet snow fell, but by morning there was little evidence of it. There was a light frosting on the rooftops of houses and garages that I could see from our kitchen window. Around mid-day, large, fluffy snowflakes fell for about an hour, but didn't stay, so I didn't consider this to be our first snowfall. I received an interesting scrap of paper from Susan Casella, a long-time member of the Heritage Markham Committee. Her family has lived in the rural part of Whitchurch-Stouffville for quite a few years now, after moving from Buttonville. The scrap of paper is a page from a Markham Township Auditors' Report dated at Unionville, 1909. The report stated that the Township's financial assets in the year 1908 were \$39,218.21, less expenditures of \$36,466.02, leaving a balance of \$2,752.29. A shortfall of \$2329.33 in taxes remained uncollected. Such was the small scale of the rural township's financial affairs in the early twentieth century. Today's City of Markham works with millions, not thousands, of dollars. What a contrast!

Susan found this paper pressed between the pages of an old cookbook. Someone had recycled this scrap to copy out a recipe for griddle cakes. Was this a recipe copied from a package of Quaker Oats, or was this a recipe borrowed from another family member or a neighbour at a time when most residents of Markham lived on farms? Maybe we will try to make the griddle cakes some time. Here is the recipe just as it was hand-written in lead pencil:

quaker oats griddle cakes

2 cups of quaker oats  
1 ½ cup of flower [sic]  
1 teaspoonful of salt  
1 teaspoon of soda dissolved in  
two tablespoons of hot water  
1 teaspoon of baking powder  
mix in flower  
2 ½ cup of buttermilk  
2 eggs beaten lightly  
1 tablespoon of sugar  
1 or too [sic] tablespoons of  
melted butter according to  
the richness of the milk

process

soak 2 cups of quaker oats over  
night in milk in the morning mix and sift  
flower soda and sugar and salt add this to  
quaker oats mixture and quantity of melted butter  
add eggs beaten lightly beat thoroughly and cook  
as griddle cakes they make your mouth  
water for more

**November 16** – George Street is a street of interesting old houses, some of the oldest remaining in the village. At 19 George, next to the bowling green, is a low, red brick house with a cottage roof. The house is set close to the street such that its Edwardian Classical front porch is almost at the street line. This simple, solid village dwelling was built by the Wilson family of masons and builders. They had an early start in this area when George Wilson, the family patriarch, constructed “Braeside” for Peter Milne in 1835, overlooking Markham Mills on the Rouge. Robert, John and Thomas, sons of George and Charlotte Wilson, followed their father in his trade. The house at 19 George Street was built *circa* 1857. Its most noteworthy owner was Dr. James G. Freel, an American who is said to have come to Upper Canada in 1837 to assist William Lyon Mackenzie in his rebellion. I’d like to know what role the doctor played in this event. Perhaps there are letters between the two men preserved in some historical collection that would shed some light on this question. That’s more research than I have time for right now. To continue the story, Dr. Freel initially settled in the village of Stouffville,

but by 1866 a directory of Markham Village informs us that he had moved here, and was listed as a “physician, surgeon and coroner.”<sup>19</sup> Dr. Freel died in 1873, but his widow and two of his children stayed on. The property remained in the family until 1921. James G. Freel’s descendants included several generations of medical doctors that served the Stouffville-Markham community for many years.

**November 17** – Back to the many historical houses of George Street, across from the Freel House is a good example of classic Georgian Tradition architecture, the Wilson Double House at 20-22 George Street. This full two-storey, red brick dwelling, also built by the Wilson family of masons and builders, was once distinguished by its gable-end parapet walls, a feature commonly seen in urban residences but not often seen in rural or village settings. In recent times, the parapets have been removed and replaced by conventional overhanging eaves, an unfortunate loss of a significant architectural element. The one at the south end survived until 2010. I wonder if the builders of 20-22 George Street envisioned a street of similar houses and used this construction detail, intended as a firebreak, with that idea in mind. This double, or semi-detached pair appears on Markham Village Plan 18, 1850, so it is at least that old, or perhaps a few years older. The Edwardian Classical verandahs were added in the early twentieth century. Robert Wilson and his family lived in one half, and his brother John and his family lived in the other. For a time, their parents, George and Charlotte Wilson, lived here too. George Wilson, an English immigrant, specialized as a mason, but his sons Robert, John and Thomas worked in both the building and mercantile trades at various times. No doubt many of the early brick buildings in Markham Village were constructed by this family of masons. Robert Wilson in particular left his mark on the village as the contractor for the Town Hall in 1881.

Today was supposed to be an unusually warm one due to weather patterns coming in from the south-west, but this temporary warm-up came late. It was cool and drizzly for much of the afternoon. When I went outside to turn off the Christmas lights at about 9:00 p.m., it was a wonderfully mild 15 degrees, but quite windy.

**November 18** – The disastrous effects of the recent unprecedented rainfall in southern British Columbia were very much in the news over the past several days. The unusually heavy rainfall that happened in a short timeframe has caused landslides, widespread flooding and much devastation of communities and agricultural lands. After seeing the images of washed-out roads and vast, flooded areas, it occurred to me that it is fortunate that the place where we live is fairly secure from this type of natural disaster, based on our local topography. Most of Old Markham Village is located on a flat area that gently slopes to the south, bordered by tributaries of the Rouge River. On the east side is Mount Joy Creek (formerly known as Exhibition Creek), and on the west side, Robinson Creek. The valley and floodplain of Robinson Creek is deeper and wider than Mount Joy Creek, and contains extensive wetlands. I’m not aware that flooding has historically been a problem in Markham Village, perhaps with the exception of Hurricane Hazel in 1954.



P.S. Linaire Armstrong later told me this story, which she heard from her husband, Dave:

“There was another major flood that took place in the late 1920s or early 1930s. Dave Armstrong’s aunt, Marjorie Armstrong was swept downstream with her date Turk Nighswander. The bridge across Wellington Street (Highway 7) just east of the Fairgrounds (Library) and west of the cemetery was taken out. Turk drove into the floodwaters and the car was carried to the Armstrong/Penny fence line before they managed to get out.”

**November 19** – Partial lunar eclipse – 98% coverage. I watched the lunar eclipse at several intervals in the early hours of this day. My vantage point was a west-facing upstairs bedroom window. At first it looked like cloud cover would obscure this event, but by 3:00 a.m., when I first got up to look for the moon, it was quite visible in the western sky. The eclipse had started at 12:48 a.m. By the time I saw it, the dark shadow of the earth covered about half of the moon, and the part of the moon that was not covered shone very brightly, so much so that it was difficult to focus on it. I went back to sleep and awoke again just before 4:00 a.m. The maximum coverage for the eclipse, 98 per cent, was supposed occur at 4:17, so I was a bit early to see that. What I did see was the earth’s shadow covering all but a thin, crescent-shaped section of the face of the moon. The shadow was disc-shaped and brownish-red in colour. The portion of the moon that was not in shadow was more distinct than it had been an hour earlier. So, back to bed only to awake one hour later to see the earth’s shadow receding and the brightness of the exposed portion of the moon shining intensely bright as it had at 3:00. Before the eclipse, I had read that it would last 6.02 hours, the longest near-complete eclipse of the moon to have occurred in 580 years. This was celestial history in the making, and I saw it happen.

**November 20** – The seasonal holiday lights are now up on Main Street. On the lamp posts there are lights in the form of shooting stars in cool white, and on the lawn in front of St. Andrew’s United Church a giant, illuminated snowflake has reappeared, boldly signaling that the holiday season is here. Further north on Main Street, just outside of the business district, there’s an illuminated deer in front of the other St. Andrew’s Church, the Presbyterian one. As the days grow shorter and the dark hours of the evenings and nights seem so long, this extra light in the village helps brighten the mood with happy thoughts of the upcoming holidays. While picking up food at a local restaurant, I saw a poster and flyers promoting an upcoming event organized by Main Street Markham (the Markham Village Business Improvement Association) that is a Christmas Market. “Light it Up” is happening on two Friday evenings, one in November (the 26<sup>th</sup>) and one in December (the 10<sup>th</sup>). The event is described as “a celebration of lights, holiday market and shop local event.” Looking forward to it!

**November 21** – St. Andrew’s United Church at 32 Main Street North, originally Markham Village Wesleyan Methodist, has the distinction of being the oldest church building in Markham Village. It was built in 1862 to replace a Methodist chapel dating

from the early days of the congregation in the mid-1830s. The architecture of St. Andrew's blends the nineteenth century Romanesque initial phase of the building with the Sunday School addition of 1950 and a modernist front that looks to me like it was built in the 1960s. An archival view of the front of the church before it was altered is found in *Markham 1900-2000, Our Past Inspires our Future*.<sup>20</sup> Each phase of construction is a product of its own time and reminds me of the ancient cathedrals of Europe that were altered and added to over the centuries in the prevailing ecclesiastical style of the period. An interesting feature of the oldest part of the building is the treatment of the windows, which are divided into upper and lower sections by wide brick panels. The position of the panels corresponds to the level of an interior gallery or balcony. The original glazing of the windows was multi-paned, in the Georgian tradition. Another noteworthy detail is the bull's eye window or oculus on the front wall of the tower. It is a blind window with faux glazing that is reminiscent of a wagon wheel. Could this be a reference to the Speight Wagon Company's extensive industrial complex that was once the church's neighbour to the south? The Speight family were members of the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Perhaps they were major contributors to the cost of the new building of 1862 and were acknowledged in the design of the church in this way, but this is only speculation on my part.

In many Ontario villages, the churches of various denominations were prominently located on the main street or major cross-streets, but in the case of St. Andrew's, the church was built far back from the street frontage, almost surrounded by the businesses, industries and residences of this intensively-developed area of Markham Village. This location is a noteworthy oddity about this church, perhaps a little less odd now that some of the buildings that were once in front of and around it are gone. The seasonal illuminated snowflake stands on the former site of the William Speight House, demolished to open up the frontage of St. Andrews to create a greenspace that provides a better view to the front of the church.<sup>21</sup>

**November 22** – A very busy morning at the bird feeder on this bright, cool day. Red-breasted nuthatches, purple finches and a lone chickadee were competing for positions on the seed feeder and suet feeder. Mid-morning, I walked down Main Street to St. Andrew's United Church to try to find a datestone for the modernist front addition, but there was no datestone to be seen. There was a cold west wind blowing, so I stayed on the west side of the street to take advantage of the shelter that the buildings provided.

**November 23** – The first snow to stay on the ground fell yesterday evening and during the night. It didn't amount to much more than a dusting. Fred Robbins came by with a jar of home-made apple sauce made from apples gathered at the Scadding Cabin at the C.N.E. grounds. There are several heirloom types of apple trees that have been planted around the cabin to provide an historic setting. Fred has been told that the apples are all pippins, and that the reason these were chosen was because they originated in the same part of England as the Scadding family. I learned that Cox's orange pippin was

developed in England in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and has been called the classic English apple.<sup>22</sup> I have also read that the pippin, today uncommon, has been grown in America since the 18th century and is one of the oldest commercially-grown variety of apples in that country. Maybe some can be found in the apple orchard at the Markham Museum. Pippins are a winter apple picked in late fall. There are a number of varieties other than the orange pippin, but this is the one I recognize because a number of years ago, Loblaw's sold apple juice made from orange pippins grown in New Zealand, I believe. It was marketed as the best-tasting apple juice, and I would have to agree. Eventually, the supply of apples ran out and the product was discontinued in the 1990s.

**November 24** – A bright day, cold at first, but it warmed to 7 degrees locally. In the afternoon, a work crew finished up the demolition of the garage at 1 Peter Street today, in preparation for the construction of the new addition. Most of the demolition happened yesterday. When the aluminum siding was removed, red Insul-brick cladding was revealed as the probable original exterior treatment. From a distance, it almost looked like real red brick. Insul-brick is an obsolete siding made of material similar to that of asphalt shingles. It came in interlocking panels or rolls. It was applied to many frame houses after it was introduced in the early 1940s by Building Products Limited of Montreal. Once you covered your house in Insul-brick, you didn't need to paint the wood siding any more, and the panels kept out drafts. Now decidedly out of fashion, it is hard to find examples since it has been diligently covered up with more fashionable material such as aluminum and vinyl. Steve Hill, the curator of the Haliburton Highlands Museum, is the acknowledged expert on Insul-brick. He has studied it, collected samples of many different patterns and colours, and located the trade material from the time it was produced. Many of the frame houses on Peter Street, including ours, were clad in Insul-brick.

**November 25** – American Thanksgiving today, Black Friday tomorrow. An overcast day, a little drizzly but fairly mild. I was talking with Doug Denby, the Unionville "history commentator" the other day and he remarked about the increasing influence of American (i.e. U.S.) culture in Canada. He pointed out the fairly recent phenomenon of Canadian Black Friday in particular, which happens on the same day as it does across the border. Some people here celebrate both the Canadian and American Thanksgivings as a way of getting in an extra turkey dinner – not a bad idea. This year, we'll do that at our house, but on Friday, not today. It's around this time of November when the Pennsylvania-German Folklore Society of Ontario has traditionally held its annual Sausage and Sauerkraut Dinner at Cedar Grove, in the fellowship hall of the Rouge Valley Mennonite Church. I believe the timing of this event is generally based on American Thanksgiving, given the American origin of our Pennsylvania-German settlers. The event isn't happening again this year due to the on-going pandemic, an understandable situation. I'll miss that, especially the home-baked pies.

**November 26** – "Light it Up" began at 6:00 p.m. today. It was seasonably cold, around the freezing mark. A brisk north-west wind was blowing in the afternoon, which made

it feel much colder than it actually was. My wife and I went “downtown” a little after 7:00 p.m., following our extra Thanksgiving dinner. By then, the wind had diminished so it was a little more pleasant to be outside. The focus of Light it Up was a large tent that was set up where the Farmers’ Market is located, the parking lot at Main and Robinson Streets. We were greeted at the door by John Webster, Markham’s Official Town Crier, and by chance met up with some friends for a chat. The holiday market had many vendors and numerous visitors. We sampled freshly-made mini donuts and had a look at the kinds of things that people were selling. One innovative entrepreneur’s booth was called “Blind Date with a Book,” where many books were on display, wrapped in plain paper neatly tied with twine. The idea is that you, or the person you were gifting the book to, would have no idea of what they would be reading. There was a popcorn and hot chocolate booth outside of the tent, by the Old Town Hall, and down the alley leading to the gelato shop, a very convincing Santa was sheltered within a bright, Christmasy grotto. The tree-lighting on Main Street was scheduled to take place at 7:30, but we started feeling the cold, so we decided we could not stay. We walked home happy to have braved the weather to experience the first day of Light it Up.

**November 27** – We had left-overs from last night’s Turkey dinner, so I made turkey-wild rice soup in the morning, ready in time for lunch. I’ve just finished reading two books based on an old Markham Township farm: *And So They Bought a Farm* and *Along the Sideroad*, by Dean Hughes. They were kindly loaned to me by Doug and Jean Denby, who knew the author and his wife personally. The books are fictionalized accounts of a couple from the city who followed their dream of moving out to the country to live a simpler life, which Dean Hughes and his wife actually did in 1945. They bought a 100 acre farm with century-old buildings a little to the northwest of Unionville, which is called “Mapleville” in the books. They named the property Briarwood Farm. With no farming experience themselves, they were fortunate that the bachelor farmer who sold them the property stayed on as their hired man to do most of the actual farm work. The books are interesting beyond their entertainment value. They provide a good description of what farm life was like when Markham was mostly an agricultural community and the family farm was still common in rural Ontario. The books portray how suburban development followed the extension of the Don Valley Parkway to the north, encouraging speculators and developers to buy up farmland at ever-increasing prices that even long-time farmers found impossible to resist. Eventually, as much as the owners of Briarwood Farm wanted to preserve their rural paradise, the reality of soaring land values and of being surrounded by acres of new homes instead of acres of crops compelled them to sell off all but a corner of the original property. Today, the last remnant of Briarwood Farm is in the process of being developed into an enclave of large new homes. The old farmhouse, protected by heritage designation, is planned to remain, but with a large rear addition that will be its new front on a new interior street. From Sixteenth Avenue, the historic part of the house will be visible after being hidden for years behind a high fence and dense vegetation.

**November 28** – First thing in the morning, Markham Village looked like a winter postcard. We woke up and looked out the window to see the lawn, street, trees and houses blanketed with a thick layer of fluffy white snow. It was still snowing, and it continued all through the day. There's something special about the first snowfall of the season. The November world turned to shades of grey and brown is suddenly brightened up and becomes something fresh and new. This week will be cold enough for the snow to stay around for a while. While on a walk through Cedar Valley Park, I encountered an older gentleman, well-dressed for the weather, with his small black dog following along as they crossed the bridge over Robinson Creek. The dog was obviously enjoying the fresh snow, and his face was covered in it. On the way back to the beginning of the pathway, I saw the man again and this time he stopped and asked me if I believe in God, gesturing to our surroundings and making a comment about the beauty of nature that we were immersed in that morning. There was a dignified-looking cardinal at the bird-feeder in the late afternoon, the first I have seen in a while.

**November 29** – The morning sky was clear and bright, bringing a sharp clarity to everything outside. The air was fresh and cold when I ventured outside with the dog. Yesterday's snowfall remained, other than what had been shoveled from driveways and walkways. A good day to begin with a bowl of hot oatmeal. Later on, the sky clouded over with a sad, grey tone that was relieved when yesterday's cardinal came back to the bird feeder just before lunch time. The cardinal's bright red colour seemed to glow against the dullness of the late November landscape. It's now close to the end of November, and with the recent snowfall, we've been inspired to purchase Christmas cards to begin sending out within the next few days. I have heard that if you want your cards and packages delivered before Christmas, they need to be mailed by December 10.

**November 30** – While driving north on Main Street after dark, we noticed that the west end of the Mount Joy GO Station parking lot had been transformed into a spectacular, animated light show. As we passed by, we saw a number of vehicles driving through the display at a leisurely pace. I was immediately reminded of the impressive light display in Niagara Falls that is set up every year in Victoria Park. In Markham, the setting is not so majestic, but the display is something to see nonetheless. It's new to this area. This morning I drove over to the location off Bur Oak to see what it was called: Journey into Enchantment Christmas Drive-Through Festival. Radio 92.1 is the sponsor. The idea is that you pay a fee per vehicle for the drive-through. The light show is visible from Main Street, but to properly experience it really requires a drive through. Another something to brighten up the dark skies of the season.

**December 1** – The snow that fell on the weekend was melting away with today's mild temperature of 4 degrees. By tomorrow, it will all be gone. I purchased a fully Canadian almanac, *Harrowsmith's Almanac*, to see how its weather predictions compare with the American *Farmer's Almanac* for accuracy. The mild temperatures this week were not predicted by either publication. I don't really expect them to get the weather right, because even the forecasts of Environment Canada can be off. Looking at the almanacs

is mainly for amusement. Sometimes the forecasts are at least close to the actual weather trends. Both almanacs predict a colder than normal winter for 2021-2022. This fall I noticed the walnut trees and maples produced an abundance of seeds, more than usual it seemed to me. Is this a sign of a hard winter?

**December 2** – A grey, wet start for the day, with light rain and mild temperatures of 7 to 8 degrees. The snow had utterly vanished. The sun came out around midday. A fellow-walker on Peter Street commented “it’s like spring.” It did feel like a pleasant day in late March, for a while, then in the afternoon a wind came up and it felt cooler than the air temperature. Still like late March, but not very nice to be outside.

Across Main Street from the drive-through “Journey Through Enchantment” light display is an emerging, dense urban district on former commercial and larger rural residential properties between Edward Jeffreys Avenue and Bur Oak Avenue. This is quite a contrast with the scale and character that used to exist near the northern limits of Mount Joy. When the first high-rise tower went up, some long-time residents were not happy about this dramatic change to their community. The building could be seen from a number of distant vantage points in Markham, and therefore made quite an impression. This residential intensification is outside of the heritage district and doesn’t affect the old village directly, so it seems to me to have been well-placed even though it represents a definite departure from the traditional scale and architecture of the adjacent village. The Mount Joy GO Station is nearby, a great advantage for commuters. From the construction of the first tower several years ago, as of 2021 there are four tall buildings, with another under construction. The ground level space of the new buildings contains commercial units. Although one heritage building was tragically destroyed in a locally well-known “accidental demolition” many years before the development of the area began, another important heritage building was preserved and incorporated into a group of townhouses west of the towers. The Albert Wideman House was moved from its original frontage on Main Street North to 226 Edward Jeffreys Avenue. This house, a significant example of the Queen Anne Revival style in red brick, was built in 1895. Albert Wideman was a leading citizen of Markham Village and along with his brother operated A. & H. Wideman Hardware and Jewelry, a successful business on the east side of Main Street.

**December 3** – Preparing Christmas cards to send out to people we know, both locally and out-of-town. The day turned out better than expected, cool and bright. In the afternoon, my son James and I took a walk in Cedar Valley Park. There was some bird activity among the cedars at the north end of the park, but nowhere else. We could hear the birds twittering away, but could not get a good look at them to see what kind they were.

**December 4** – On Saturday, Doug and Jean Denby came by for a tour to see what we had done with the Abram Sider House. They liked seeing how we had retained much of the original room layout and the old trimwork. In some old houses, you somehow get a

sense of the people who lived there before. I don't get that here. I think it's because this property has passed through many owners since it was built. Ours is a pleasant old house to live in. It's not like a museum, but rather a comfortable (if a little modest in size) home with a lot of character.

Living in an old house is different from the experience of living in a newer house. Markham Village is the largest of Markham's heritage conservation districts, both in terms of land area and the number of heritage buildings. There are different kinds of heritage house lifestyles. Some people like the idea of living in a century home, but want everything but the "bones" to be new. That approach to renewing older homes came about in the 1970s, when late Victorian houses in old neighbourhoods in Toronto had their painted brick sandblasted, their old windows replaced with plain casement windows, and their interiors opened up and painted white or off-white. The concept was to contrast the old with the new, and the effect was often striking, especially when patterned brickwork in red and buff was revealed after decades of being painted over. This approach left very little original material in place. In the U.S., at around the same time, a publication called *The Old House Journal* was launched to promote an authentic approach to the rehabilitation of old houses.<sup>23</sup> It was a practical, how-to source of information and technology aimed at people who did a lot of the work themselves. Later, *Canada Century Home* magazine came along to appeal to a Canadian audience of old house owners and to those who dreamed of one day having an old house of their own to restore. It was a less technical publication than *The Old House Journal*, but nevertheless was an inspiration to old house enthusiasts. At 4 Peter Street, we did what I like to call an *Old House Journal* restoration of the exterior, very authentic to the late 1890s in terms of the materials, the details and the multi-coloured Queen Anne Revival paint colour scheme. Inside, we left any original features that survived the renovations that had taken place before we became the owners in 2015, and added back the proper baseboards and wood doors where they were missing. We took great care to source the right hardware for the doors and windows from Ed Casella's shop in Whitchurch-Stouffville. We didn't do a full period restoration inside, but kept an old house feel with the choice of historical paint colours and an eclectic mix of antique furniture and lighting.

**December 6** – Quite a storm last night, with wild snow flurries and strong winds at the beginning. The wind was coming from the east, which is unusual. Into the evening, the snow changed to sleet that noisily pelted our living room window with a sharp tick-tick-tick sound, which greatly troubled our dog. Freezing rain had been predicted but fortunately never materialized. We were prepared for the electricity to possibly go out with the storm, just in case, but the power stayed on with no interruptions.

This morning, I walked through Tannery Pond Park, starting from the Bullock Dive entrance. With the leaves down and some of the wetland plants flattened by the wind, it was easier to follow the course of the creek as it runs through the shallow valley. It was quiet down there mid-morning, with no other walkers around, and no wildlife to be

seen or heard. I walked home via Robinson Street and Main Street. At the Robinson Street bridge, the creek was running so high and fast over the boulders in its bed that it appeared like rapids, with whitecaps and all. This is the highest I have seen Robinson Creek's water level so far this year. At the Town Square, I saw that the Christmas tree was lit in yellow gold lights.

The mild temperatures of the first half of the day dramatically changed by the early afternoon, accompanied by high westerly winds with gusts of 70 to 80 kmh. I took down the bird feeder as a precaution, because it is right in the path of the prevailing west wind. This afternoon was a good time to continue writing Christmas cards to friends and family.

**December 7** – Completed writing and mailing the last of 28 Christmas cards today. This morning on the news I heard that for cards destined for Canadian addresses, December 17, not December 10 is the deadline to ensure delivery by Christmas. I like this old-fashioned practice of sending cards to friends and relatives. Some people prefer “e-cards,” and I have seen some good ones, complete with animation. Very creative, but less of a personal touch.

In the late afternoon of this cold day, a fine snow started falling and stayed on the ground and roads. Fred Robbins called in the afternoon to tell me that Archibald Barker, an early and influential resident of Markham, was on Reverend Henry Scadding's list of early members of the York Pioneer and Historical Society found in the appendices of *Toronto of Old*. He said that Barker's date of settlement in Markham was given as 1829. Fred added that Hon. David Reesor was also a member of the Society. At one time, you were only eligible to join if you came to York prior to the incorporation of the City of Toronto in 1834.

**December 8** – A cold, grey day with more snow on the ground this morning. This afternoon, as more snow flurries came down, I received my COVID-19 booster shot. Yesterday, I said to Fred Robbins that Archibald Barker was an important person in the early history of Markham Village, but there is not much written about him in the published histories of the village or of Markham Township. I looked into his story while I was still the Senior Heritage Planner at the City and had easy access to a variety of research sources. My conclusion: Archibald Barker was one of the principal founders of this community, a true unsung hero. Archibald Barker (1808-1881) was a native of Sanouhar, Dumfriesshire, Scotland.<sup>24</sup> I could not find when he came to Upper Canada, but as early as 1828 he and business partner James Johnston were negotiating the purchase of Lot 9, Concession 8, Markham Township, a Clergy Reserve Lot, from the Crown. This was a valuable property because the Rouge River ran through it, making it a prime candidate for a mill site. Barker was only 20 years old at the time. The deal fell through, but before that happened, a one and a half storey frame house had been constructed at the northwest corner of the property. The south half of the building contained a store and post office. It still stands at 53 Main Street south as the oldest



known residence in Markham Village. James Johnston became Markham's first postmaster in 1829, but his time was short-lived.<sup>25</sup> Johnston died in 1832, and Archibald Barker took over his position. The Honorable Peter McGill received the Crown Patent for the property in 1842, and two years later, sold to Archibald Barker. Perhaps there was some connection between these gentlemen that facilitated this arrangement. Barker served as postmaster from 1832 to 1862, and again from 1874-1881. He and his wife, Elizabeth Miller, lived all their lives in the frame house overlooking the Rouge Valley. In 1844, Barker purchased a lot next door to the north of his residence and a two-storey red brick building was constructed there, possibly in 1852 when Barker took out a mortgage. The building contained a store and residential quarters, with the commercial section being in the south half with the double doors. This building, addressed 29 James Walker Court, has been well-restored on the exterior. The store and post office were moved from the Barker residence to the new building, where they remained until 1866, when according to the reminiscences of a long-time resident of the village, they moved up the hill to the west side of Main Street to a general store operated by James Barker, Archibald and Elizabeth's son.<sup>26</sup>

Archibald Barker was primarily a merchant and postmaster, but he did so much more than that. He created a subdivision of streets and lots on the tableland on his property, including Rouge Street and Nelson Street, where many of the village's working class lived. In the valley, he established the Glen Rouge grist mill, a brewery and an oat meal mill. He was the owner of a considerable amount of valuable property. In addition to his business ventures, Barker was a notary public, Justice of the Peace, an early public school trustee, and a member of Markham Township Council from 1861-1865. Truly he was a community-builder worthy of recognition for his role in the early development of Markham Village. He saw the fledgling hamlet of Reesorville grow into the Township's centre of industry and commerce. I wonder if a photographic portrait of Archibald Barker exists somewhere.

**December 9** – Recovering from my COVID-19 booster shot (Pfizer). It was cold outside, a good day to stay indoors. I experienced chills, a mild headache and a general feeling of tiredness, nothing more significant than that. Not a lot got done today. I felt better by the evening.

**December 10** – The beginning of a series of days of mild temperatures. This was accurately predicted by the *Farmer's Almanac*, with an opposite forecast by the Canadian *Harrowsmith's Almanac*. Tonight is the second part of the Light it Up event in downtown Markham Village. The milder temperatures will be welcome, I am sure, to make attending the event more appealing. The last time, there was a cold wind, which made it less comfortable to be out on the street.

**December 11** – Heavy rain overnight. In the morning, there were news reports about a devastating line of tornados that passed through Kentucky last night, an unusual occurrence there, particularly destructive and deadly. In all, an astounding 50 tornados

were reported in the U. S. Midwest. It seems as though these reports of climate-related disasters are becoming more frequent.

Just before lunch I walked through Cedar Valley Park and saw that some low areas had been flooded by our strong nighttime rainstorm. Robinson Creek was at such a high level that it was overflowing its banks and flowed a muddy brownish-green, with none of the usual boulders in its bed visible at all. It was a day of sun and cloud, with the pleasant mild temperature of 16 degrees making it feel spring-like. This set a record. One fellow walker I encountered was in shorts. The wind was beginning to blow, and just as I came around the final bend in the trail before the exit to the street, I heard a sharp cracking sound and a small tree fell over not too far from where I stood, but not close enough to be a danger to me. I suppose it was a dead tree and that was why it was so brittle. This was the first time I had ever seen something like this happen. The tree snapped at a point near to its base. In the afternoon, a strong wind from the south-west increased in strength until wind gusts were reported at 96 kph by about 5:30 p.m., roaring around the house and jostling the tall Manitoba maples on the south side of our lot. I was plugging in the Christmas lights at the time, and you could feel the powerful energy of the windstorm. High winds lasted well into the evening.

**December 12** – For dessert tonight I enjoyed an Empire cookie purchased yesterday at Reesor’s Market and Bakery in Stouffville. Reesor’s had a good selection of traditional Christmas baked goods on display near the cash, facing the store entrance. There were decorated shortbread cookies, Empire cookies, mincemeat tarts and more. We bought half a dozen Empire cookies, the sandwich cookies with jam in between, white icing on top, and decorated with a piece of candied cherry. I had always thought that these cookies were a British specialty, and since Canada was once part of the British Empire, it made sense to me that we would share this traditional treat. A little research proved me wrong. I learned that these sandwich cookies originated in Austria, and were popular in many countries. Prior to World War One, they were called Deutsch or Linzer biscuits, and were renamed Empire biscuits during the conflict, for the same reason why Berlin, Ontario became Kitchener. In Canada, we call them Empire cookies more often than we call them Empire biscuits.

**December 13** – A sunny, mild day to start the week. Much is in the news concerning the spread of the OMICRON variant of COVID-19, and how it will overtake the DELTA variant very soon. More people are now eligible to receive their booster shots of vaccine.

We were very fortunate to have no damage done to our property during the big windstorm of December 11, however there was one outcome of the storm worth noting. Due to our Norway maple and sugar maple at the back of our lot being late to drop their leaves, we had not raked up any leaves in the back third of our yard. Today I noticed that the wind had somehow gathered up most of these leaves and created a remarkably neat pile of them right in front of the garage. It must have had something to do with the way the wind was passing through our property, affected by the

arrangement of fences and structures. All that's left to do is to stuff the leaves into leaf bags, but the City may have done its last pick-up of yard waste for the year so we may have to hold onto them.

**December 14** – Received our first Christmas card today. Most of the shopping for gifts, both in stores and online, has been completed. It's nice having this part of our Christmas preparations done early, especially considering that cases of COVID-19 have risen sharply in the past several days. Will there be restrictions re-imposed by the province on in-store shopping? Something to watch.

**December 15** – Cool and grey and a little wet today. I'm reading a new book of nature poems by Paul Leet Aird titled *Butterfly Beautifully Beautiful*. Paul Aird is another person who appreciates the artwork of Thoreau MacDonald, and several of Thoreau's drawings appear in the book. The poems express the author's reverence for nature while drawing attention to threats to the natural environment and biodiversity. I appreciate that Markham has taken care to preserve some natural areas within walking distance of the village.

Life at the bird feeder has been a little slow lately, but just after lunch a tiny, red-breasted nuthatch visited the seed feeder and a downy woodpecker visited the suet feeder. A grey squirrel has visited the suet feeder more than the birds over the past few days. My sister Leanne came down from Norwood today and joined us for lunch, the first time I have seen her since Thanksgiving 2019.

**December 16** – The temperature forecast for today, 16 degrees (just over 60 degrees Fahrenheit) was achieved by mid-afternoon. This is a record-breaker, I believe. Just like last Saturday's weather, very strong winds from the south-west were predicted, but as this entry was being written at around 2:00 p.m. in the afternoon, conditions were fairly still. I walked down Main Street mid-morning while it was still pleasant to be outside. Many other people were out walking at the same time, for a similar reason as me, I imagine. I headed west on Bullock Drive on my way to Cedar Valley Park to try to find the small tree that I had seen and heard fall over during the last windstorm.

For people that live in the northern part of Markham Village, Bullock Drive is a convenient and efficient way to travel to shopping centres on Highway 7, to Loblaws, and to the Markville Mall. The usual bottleneck of Main Street through the commercial area can be avoided by using this route. I recently saw a street map of Markham Village dating from the 1960s (*Perly's Bluemap Atlas of Greater Toronto, 1972, Executive Edition*) that showed the original sections of Bullock Drive that went in with the Robinson subdivisions of the early to mid-1950s. I'm not sure when Bullock Drive was extended west to connect with McCowan Road, or when it was extended east to connect to Main Street. It seems likely that the connection to Main Street happened around the same time as the subdivisions on the Reesor and Raymer farms were developed. At least one house on Main Street had to be demolished to complete the connection. I remember

someone telling me that this house was not a heritage building, but when I looked at an old photographic inventory of heritage buildings from the 1970s stored in the library of the City's Heritage Section, I saw that an Ontario Gothic cottage was once on the site. I believe it may have been the home of the Prentice family.

I went into Cedar Valley Park from the Snider Drive entrance. I noticed that Robinson Creek was still higher than usual, but not as high as I had last seen it. I located my toppled tree, but saw more that must have come down or lost branches later on during that incredibly windy day. The wind damage was mainly on the east side of the park. One tree next to the path that connects the park to Backus Court had snapped off about three feet about the ground. It must have blocked the path because the top of the tree had been moved and leaned up against other trees on the opposite side of the path. Not a huge tree by any means, but still a tree. The winds picked up after dark, but were not as fierce as they were last Saturday.

**December 17** – Dave Wylie, the restoration contractor that restored the exterior of our 1890s home, dropped by with a gift box of Christmas treats. He's done this every year since he and his crew worked on the house. His wife Agnes has a Dutch background and some of the home baking included traditional Dutch specialties. This year, Agnes used Dave's mother's (the late Vivian Wylie) recipe for traditional English plum pudding and kindly wrote out the recipe for the sweet sauce that goes with it. We've also received Christmas cookies baked by our son's fiancé, and home-crafted truffles made by Linda's co-worker.

**December 18** – A good snowfall was forecast for today, with more snow possible during the week. Flurries began around 10:00 a.m. and continued into the afternoon. A white Christmas seems a certainty with cold temperatures expected that will allow the snow to stay. In the afternoon, Linda and I walked through Springdale Park and saw many trees and branches brought down by the recent windstorms. There was more damage here than in Cedar Valley. One coniferous tree fell across Robinson Creek and blocked its flow.

News reports tell of ever-larger numbers of cases of COVID-19 leading to the reinstatement of restrictions by the provincial government. Many events are being cancelled or postponed. It is disappointing to hear all this news when things seemed to been looking up not too long ago. The OMICRON variant and its rapid spread have changed the picture in a matter of only three weeks since it was detected.

**December 19** – Sunny and cold today, but no new snowfall. Today I am sending Christmas greetings via email to some of my former work colleagues. The Christmas tree went up yesterday. Leo, our son John's cat, is very curious and active and has been nibbling on the branches and pulling bows off the gifts we've wrapped so far. At one point, he began climbing the Christmas tree from the inside, getting about one third up before we caught him at it. A bright full moon rose in the eastern sky in the evening.

**December 20** – This morning I was trying to figure out the location of the Honorable David Reesor's residence where he lived before he built his large buff brick house at 166 Main Street North. In *Markham 1793-1900* there is a description of a large fire that occurred on May 30, 1872.<sup>27</sup> The author noted that the fire started in the stables of the Reesor house and moved northward on Main Street until several homes and businesses on the east side of the street were destroyed. From looking at Markham Village Plan 18, 1850, and the map of Markham Village in the *Historical Atlas of York County, 1878*, I believe the Reesor House was north of Joseph Street, possibly in behind the businesses on Main Street.

Plan 18 is an interesting map of the village as it was in 1850, prepared by surveyor George McPhillips, who also created a map of Markham Township dated 1853-54. Plan 18 is not a plan of subdivision, but rather a map that shows the village streets and lots as they had evolved over time through many land transactions. The map shows the outlines of buildings that existed at the time, with a few labelled as to their identity. Not many buildings remain from this early period in the history of Markham Village. Some have been moved, too. If you can find a clear copy of Plan 18, it is possible to read the notes on the map which selectively label certain features of the village. Curiously, a number of important businesses, such as the Speight Wagon Works, were not labelled. Also, Mount Joy was not part of Markham Village until 1915, therefore it does not appear on the map. Using a magnifying glass, and feeling a bit like the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes, I noted:

Post Office, A. Barker Esq. – East side of Main Street South, north side of Mill Street.

Glen Rouge Mill, A. Barker Esq. – Rouge Valley, south-east of Rouge Street.

Markham Mills, Mr. Thomas Milne – Rouge Valley, west of today's Fisher Court.

Brewery – Rouge Valley, north side of today's Fisher Court.

Oat Meal Mill – Rouge Valley, north of the Brewery, next to Main Street South.

Kiln – Rouge Valley, a little north of the Oat Meal Mill, next to Main Street South. This would be a kiln for making clay bricks.

Inn, Mr. William Armstrong – South-east corner of Main Street and today's Highway 7.

Distillery, Mr. William Armstrong – Rouge Valley north of present-day Old Wellington Street.

Gaol (Jail) – West side of Main Street, edge of the Rouge Valley, east of the Distillery.

This was the biggest surprise for me when I spotted it. The map-maker used the old spelling of Jail, but misspelled it to read "Goal."

Grace Anglican Church – West side of Main Street, a little north of the Jail.

Old Methodist Church and Cemetery, not labelled – present site of St. Andrew's United.

School House – East side of Washington Street, a little north of present-day Highway 7.

Hall's Tavern – South-west corner of Main Street North and present-day Robinson Street (later the site of the Franklin House Hotel).

Foundry and Machine Shop – North-east corner of Main Street North and Joseph Street.

Foundry – West end of present-day Robinson Street, north side.

Tannery – West end of present-day Robinson Street, south side.  
Tannery – A second tannery, north side of Wilson Street.  
Congregational Church, North side of Church Street, west of Franklin Street.  
Also on the map are three mill ponds, the tannery and foundry pond, and the distillery pond.

## WINTER 2021-2022

**December 21 – The Winter Solstice.** The shortest day of the year. After this, the days get longer and the outlook gets brighter. Cold and sunny this morning, a wintry day fitting for the change of seasons. Just hearing or reading the word “solstice” makes me think of ancient days and how the lives of our forebears were intertwined with the annual cycle of the heavens. What majestic views of the night sky in all its starry glory they must have had – vast, silent, awe-inspiring mysteries to ponder...

Dave Burkholder, President of the Pennsylvania-German Folklore Society of Ontario, wrote in the Winter, 2021 issue of the newsletter about the large number of nuts produced this year on black walnut trees, something I had had observed earlier in the fall. He wrote: *“The old timers and the Almanac say that this usually heralds a long, hard winter.”*

**December 22-24** – These few days were about Christmas preparations like grocery shopping, more gift wrapping, and possibly the buying of some last-minute gifts. All of this activity is happening in the shadow of the surge in COVID-19 cases, which is figuring large in the daily news. People are lining up for hours for booster shots of vaccine, or to pick up rapid test kits to enable safe, small gatherings over the holidays. The numbers of cases here and world-wide are worrying, with the OMICRON variant spreading fast and becoming dominant. To say the timing is bad is an understatement.

Saw a family of mallard ducks in Robinson Creek on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, also a pair of chickadees following along as my son James and I crossed the south bridge in Cedar Valley Park. When we arrived home, a purple finch was at the bird feeder, the first bird I have seen there in the past few days. Grey and black squirrels were busy everywhere.

There were snow flurries during the evening and night of December 23 – 24, enough to refresh the snow on the ground from several days earlier. Peter Street looks very picturesque after a fresh snowfall. Christmas Eve day marks the beginning of a mild spell that will likely melt the snow away.

**December 25 – Christmas Day** – Overnight rain continued into the morning. The day began mild, feeling very unlike what people think of as typical Christmas Day weather. In spite of the light rain and the above-freezing temperatures, much of the snow on the ground persisted through the first part of the day, so we had a white Christmas after all. By mid-afternoon, the snow cover was beginning to look patchy, and by dinner time,

much had melted away. Today's high was 7 degrees. *Harrowsmith's Almanac* was correct in its weather predictions; the *Farmer's Almanac* predicted "very cold," which it was not. We had a family gathering of eight, not so much because of COVID-19, but rather on account of the siblings of my wife and I celebrating with their own immediate family members.

**December 26** – A little cooler today. Traces of snow remain but for the most part the snow cover has melted away. Today is Boxing Day, traditionally a day for bargain-hunting shoppers seeking marked-down items. The escalation of cases of the highly-transmissible OMICRON variant of COVID-19 may have discouraged some people from facing crowded stores. Boxing Day for our household was mostly about tidying up by finding places for newly-acquired gifts, disposing of packaging and gift-wrap (recycling what can be recycled) and cleaning up after a full day and evening of festivities.

**December 27** – Snow flurries are cheering up a grey December day. They started out slowly just after 8:00 a.m., but intensified by the time I was preparing my oatmeal for breakfast. The house is quiet this morning with everyone still asleep but me. After lunch my son James and I walked south on Main Street, then west on Robinson Street. He was on the look-out for bird life so he could make use of his new binoculars, which were a Christmas present. At the bottom of the hill, we spotted a flock of small birds quickly flying in formation, too quickly to identify. They veered off to the left, and it was then that we spotted the hawk that troubled the other birds. The hawk perched high up in a tall tree on the north side of the street, perhaps waiting for an opportunity to strike at his prey. As we went into Tannery Pond Park, I looked up to the top of the valley where James Robinson's home of 1876 stands at 4 Homestead Court. From here, he would have had a good view of his tannery and the Maple Leaf Woolen Mill in the valley below his residence. This old house, built in the Gothic Revival style, has undergone some changes, but much of its original character remains, including the decorative bargeboards in the street-facing gable. The bargeboards are of exceptional quality, with a richly moulded Gothic profile rather than the more common flat-sawn type. Curiously, the brick of the ground floor is buff coloured, while the brick of the second floor is red. I think that it is possible that when the house was brick-veneered, Mr. Robinson's builder may have used surplus bricks from other jobs in the village as a cost-saving measure, then painted the brick walls to conceal the difference in colour. When the paint was removed during a renovation project by a modern-day later owner, the two brick colours were revealed. The Robinson House is located just outside of the heritage district.

As we continued our walk upstream along Robinson Creek, we saw several cardinals, a pair of chickadees, male and female mallard ducks, and a pigeon. Bird activity has been scarce around our house, but today many birds were encountered in the neighbouring valleylands. A couple of fellow-walkers told us that earlier in the day, six deer were spotted near the Raymerville Drive bridge over Robinson Creek.

**December 28** – It was nice to see the sun today after a series of overcast days. The interval between Christmas and New Year's Day is an odd time. It's hard to know what to do. The build-up to Christmas is over, and many businesses are closed. Maybe the idea is to be at rest for a few days at the end of the year, to prepare for what the New Year will bring. I looked up some information on James Robinson.<sup>1</sup> The Robinsons were an early family in the village, and were among the few families that came to Markham from Pennsylvania that were not of Swiss-German origin. James Robinson was in the family business of tanning hides, but was also a community leader in his political career. He served as reeve of Markham Township from 1869 to 1872, and again from 1874 to 1878. Robinson was warden of York County in 1877 and reeve of Markham Village from 1885 to 1887. There's a fine photographic portrait of him on page 78 of *Markham 1793-1900*. His home at 4 Homestead Court was formerly addressed on Robinson Street, likely before newer houses were built on either side of it. The terracing in front of the house makes it difficult to visualize how the property looked prior to Homestead Court and the other houses going in.

**December 29** – Snow is still on the ground. It didn't warm up as much as the weather forecasters predicted. A grey squirrel finished off a suet cake next to the bird seed feeder while Leo the tabby cat watched with a quiet intensity from the dining room's bay window. With less squirrel activity once the suet cake was devoured, some birds were encouraged to visit the neighbouring seed feeder. I saw a male and a female cardinal enjoying some seed in the early afternoon.

**December 30** – Hearing on the news reports of extreme cold temperatures in the Canadian West – minus 50 degrees recorded in some parts of the Prairie provinces. Significant snowfall in Vancouver. Strange times. Here in Markham, the temperatures are on the mild side, 1 degree this morning, going up to 2 or 3 degrees later. The sun was shining through thin cloud cover for a while, which was nice to see.

**December 31 – New Year's Eve.** Mild today, with a high of 6 degrees. If the sun had been shining it would have been a glorious day. Here we are at the last day of 2021. Quite a year. At least here in Markham we were not in the path of forest fires, floods, extreme heat, or tornados. The COVID-19 pandemic rages on worse than ever, but with a variant that is said to be a weaker version of the virus, some say no worse than the common cold. Markham Village has weathered the storm fairly well, and from my travels up and down Main Street it appears that most businesses have survived so far. Events have been cancelled and some public facilities remain closed, or partially closed, but when things turn around again in the fight against the pandemic, there will be hope for a return to something of a more familiar community life.

Linda and I took a walk this afternoon on the streets of the village, then through the valleylands of Robinson Creek. The water level remains high. Upon arriving back home about 3:00 p.m., we learned that beloved actress Betty White had passed away at the age



of 99. She would have turned 100 on January 17. She was one of those well-known people that you think will somehow live on forever.

## 2022

**January 1 – New Year’s Day.** I awoke to the sound of fireworks at midnight, as 2021 was done, and 2022 began. It must have been quite a show to see, as the sound of fireworks continued for a while. The display was close by, most likely in the GO Station’s large west parking lot. In the morning, the sky was grey but the temperature was mild. Today’s high was 3 degrees. If only the sun had been shining, the day would have been extraordinary for this time of year. Just before lunch, my wife Linda and I walked the trails of Springdale Park with our dog, Bailey, who took her time exploring all sorts of smells that only she is aware of. A cold wind from the north-west made it feel a little chilly. In the pine forest, the wind stirred the treetops, making a sound something like rushing water. From within the forest, sheltered from the wind, all was calm at ground level but up above, the tree-tops danced their graceful wind-dance.

In Toronto in the afternoon, Linda and I were surprised to see several robins looking for food in the grass alongside St. Joseph Street, west of Bay Street. Last year, the first robin I saw was on March 17, St. Patrick’s Day. I thought that robins migrated south for the winter, but maybe some stay around if the conditions are right. We were visiting our youngest son Andrew, who is attending the University of Toronto and lives near the campus.

**January 2 –** A fine snow fell in the evening and into the night, but by morning it had not amounted to anything significant. The temperature dropped from several degrees above freezing to several degrees below, quite a contrast from day to day. At breakfast time, heavier snow began to fall – fluffy white flakes drifting down from above so gentle and calm, like you might see in a Christmas movie. It was quiet indoors and outdoors at the beginning of the day, except I thought I heard the sound of a snowmobile on the move somewhere nearby. I went out for a walk while the snow was still falling in its picturesque way. It was cold on the face, with a steady north wind, but otherwise very pleasant to be outdoors. Later in the day, the sun came out from behind the clouds and there was a beautiful sunset over the horizon coloured in streaks of pink, orange and cream.

**January 3 –** Brilliant sunshine greeting us this morning, accompanied by a chilling minus 15 degrees. A still, bright, and suitably cold winter’s day. There’s something pure and clean about a day like this.

I was looking at the railway bridge next to Bullock Drive where it crosses Robinson Creek and recalled how it has not been that long since it was a timber trestle. I don’t think it was *very* old, but it had the look of the bygone days of the steam locomotive

about it. It was inevitable that at some point someone would try to set this exposed wooded structure on fire, and that day came some time in the early 2000s. Some timbers were charred but no serious damage seemed to have been done. After that incident, the railway replaced this picturesque reminder of Markham's golden age of railway travel with a sturdy, functional, and non-combustible structure of concrete and steel. The new bridge has now been there long enough to have acquired a disfiguring display of crude graffiti. I miss that old wooden trestle. A real loss to the village landscape.

**January 4** – A sunny, cold day, but less cold than yesterday. At about 4:00 p.m. I walked through Tannery Pond Park, and saw that ice was beginning to form on the margins of the creek, its whiteness contrasting with the flowing water that looked like shiny black obsidian in the light of the late afternoon. Many other walkers were enjoying this sunny winter's day, made more pleasant with an absence of wind of any significance.

I'm currently reading an old book that I received as a Christmas gift from my wife, titled *Around Home*, by Peter McArthur. The book was illustrated by the well-known Canadian artist C. W. Jefferys. It was published in 1925 by the Musson Book Company Ltd. of Toronto as the third book in a series. In some ways, the book is similar in its theme to *And So They Bought a Farm* and *Along the Sideroad*, by Markham's Dean Hughes, about city people "going back to the land." *Around Home* is a compilation of short essays published in the *Toronto Globe* in the 1910s until the author's death in October, 1924. The pieces paint a colourful picture of life on a small Ontario farm at a time when Canada was still primarily an agriculture-based society. The author's descriptions of farm life and the rural environment are informative and often amusing. Peter McArthur had a talent for observation and description, accented with a measure of philosophy and humour. Although the McArthur farm was located in Southwestern Ontario, the life described by the author is likely similar to life in old Markham Township during the same era. I learned from Doug Denby, who is familiar with Peter McArthur's writings, that the hewn log house built by McArthur's parents in the mid-nineteenth century has been relocated and preserved in Doon Heritage Village in the Region of Waterloo. Doug commented on similarities between Peter McArthur's writings and those of noted Canadian humourist Stephen Leacock. I can see that. I also hear echoes of H. D. Thoreau's *Walden* in McArthur's thoughts about humanity's relationship to the natural world.

**January 5** – Today is when the provincial government's new restrictions came into effect to help control the spread of the OMICRON variant of the COVID-19 virus. People have been processing this dramatic step backward in our progress toward returning to a normal state of things since the announcement was made on Monday of this week. You could sense the disappointment people feel when they talk about what is happening, and at the same time, hear that they are resigned to the necessity to protect the ability of hospitals to cope with the sharp increase in cases. Schools have switched to remote learning until January 17. Will this surge in cases be the last big battle with COVID-19? In our household, four out of six have had their booster shots of the vaccine.

A cold front is coming in today, and the wind from the south-west started to pick up in the afternoon. The bird feeder had to be temporarily taken down so it wouldn't get damaged when the wind gusts increased later. Our weathervane on the garage was in agreement with the reported wind direction, which is not always the case. Sometime the weathervane doesn't move because the wind is not strong enough to catch it.

**January 6** – Cold this morning, with light snow flurries. The cold was especially bone-chilling, even though the temperature was only a few degrees below freezing. This I found out when re-installing the bird feeder after last night's windstorm. Today marks one year since the unprecedented attack on the U. S. Capitol by a mob of supporters of Donald Trump who were made to believe that the election had been "stolen" from the Republicans. This morning American President Joe Biden addressed his nation with a message about the importance of upholding the democratic principle upon which the country was based.

This week work has resumed on the construction of an addition to the old Pipher House at 1 Peter Street. The crew is excavating in preparation for the construction of the foundation. I can't help but wonder if anything of interest will be dug up in the process, beyond the usual fieldstone and shards of old glass and pottery.

As sunset approached, the sun was a dark orange ball of fire in the western sky, just above the horizon. I can't recall seeing the sun in this deep shade of orange before.

**January 7** – Very cold this morning, but at least the sun is shining. The wind chill in the afternoon made it feel like minus 19 degrees. There was a biting wind from the north-west that made you want to get indoors as quickly as possible when you are outside. It's Orthodox Christmas today.

One of the best kept secrets in Markham is Princess Street in the Vinegar Hill area of Markham Village. It's a dead-end street that is adjacent to Milne Dam Conservation Area, a secluded spot with a mix of mid-twentieth century homes and large, new custom homes. I was surprised the first time I travelled along Princess Street right to the end to find the historic cemetery of Grace Anglican Church. Before the ravages of Hurricane Hazel, this street crossed the Rouge River and at its north end, it took a sharp turn to the right to rejoin Main Street. Fisher Court is the short section that was cut off after the bridge went out in the storm. Years ago, this was the lane to Milne's Markham Mills. Princess Street has been around a long time. It is shown on Plan 18, 1850 and also on George McPhillips' map of Markham Township, 1853-54. Today, there are no early buildings remaining on Princess Street, but there is one house at Number 25 that is of historical interest because of the noteworthy person who once lived there. The modest frame bungalow on this property, constructed in 1953, was originally the home of Alma (Maynard) Walker, who had a political career in Markham that spanned the years 1953 to 1979.

**January 8** – Cold again, but less windy than yesterday. Today, my thoughts returned to Alma Walker, such an important figure in Markham's mid-twentieth century history. She was a member of a prominent family of builders and entrepreneurs, the Maynards. Her bungalow on Princess Street may be modest, but Alma Walker's political career was impressive.<sup>2</sup> During her time on the Council of Markham Village and later, Council of the Town of Markham, she saw post-war suburban development transform her community from a small village into a modern town, while the surrounding agricultural base still remained strong. Alma Walker's political career began as a member of Village Council, then Reeve of the village from 1963 to 1968, and Mayor when the village became a town in 1969. With the creation of the Region of York in 1971, the community became a part of the new Town of Markham. In this larger municipality, Alma Walker served as a Local Councillor from 1973 to 1974, then a Regional Councillor from 1975 to 1979. She was the first woman in Markham's history to serve in several of her roles in her community, a real ground-breaker.

**January 9** – This morning there was much bird activity around the house. There was a brief return to above-zero temperatures today. In the front garden there were several small birds, either chickadees or nuthatches, busy about the shrubs. They were moving too quickly for me to get a good look at them so I could not be conclusive in my identification. Also in the front garden were robins foraging in the stubble. Consulting *Birds of Ontario* by Andy Bezener, I learned that robins actually spend their winters here, but keep themselves hidden.<sup>3</sup>

I always believed that robins flew south for the winter and returned here in the spring as markers of the change of seasons, but it looks like I was wrong. At the bird feeder, there was a number of purple finches, male and female. While it was still early in the morning, I walked through the Marmill Way townhouse community. In the back yard between two rows of townhouses, there were many house sparrows twittering away in a mass of shrubs. I heard them, but did not see them.

**January 10** – We have experienced a cold snap for two days. Today with the wind chill from a strong west wind it felt like minus 19 degrees. Tonight, the temperature went down to minus 21 degrees. That is cold.

At dinner on Saturday, we were talking around the table about the origins of some of the foods we commonly enjoy. For example, the potato, a staple of our diet, originated in South America. The Pennsylvania Germans that came to Markham in the early 1800s brought their food traditions with them. From my reading of *The Trail of the Black Walnut*, by G. Elmore Reaman, we have the Pennsylvania Germans to thank for double-crustured fruit pies such as the ever-popular apple pie.<sup>4</sup> But there's more: coleslaw, sauerkraut, fried potatoes, chicken pot pie, cottage cheese, donuts, cinnamon buns and cookies in the shape of animals. This is just a selection. Anyone that would like to recreate a classic Pennsylvania-German meal at home can make the trip up to Reesor's

Farm Market on Ninth Line in Markham (when it's open for the warmer seasons) or Reesor's Market and Bakery in Stouffville and purchase pork farmer's sausage, sauerkraut, apple butter and a fruit pie for dessert. Add mashed potatoes and mashed turnip and there you have a taste of local cuisine that would have been familiar in Markham Village and Mount Joy a century or more back in time.

Today's Markham, much more multi-cultural than in the early days of settlement by Europeans and Americans, allows us the opportunity to sample the world's cuisines without leaving home. On Main Street in the village there are restaurants where we can dine on the food of Italy, India, China, Japan, Thailand, Greece and Mexico, in addition to restaurants with traditional Canadian or North American menus and pub fare. In the same general area, you can have traditional English fish and chips, food from Afghanistan and spicy Caribbean dishes. I have heard on the CBC that Toronto's suburbia is actually the best place to find restaurants specializing in international cuisine, especially the family-run kind. For more variety, you'll need to venture out of Markham into Scarborough, Pickering, or North York, but you still won't need to get on a plane to find something different.

**January 11** – This was the coldest day we've had this winter so far. Minus 22 degrees. At least there wasn't a wind chill factor this morning because there was no wind. Last night, it snowed a little and freshened up the winter look of the street. Just a dusting of snow, but enough to coat everything with a new layer of white. I ventured outside to do a few things around the house, and although the cold was sharp, the absence of wind made it tolerable to be outside for a while. A warm-up to single digit temperatures didn't happen until the evening.

**January 12** – Milder today, with temperatures just above freezing. The frost has gone from our windows. Yesterday there were no birds to be seen at the feeder, but this afternoon, there was a pair of American goldfinches. They were being very picky about which seeds they ate, discarding many in the process. They're like nuthatches that way. The goldfinches have duller colouring at this time of year, it seems. Their fussy seed selection allowed for a better look at them through the window, as they spent a fair amount of time at the feeder.

**January 13** – Our house has its original windows from the 1890s, which were restored and reconditioned by David Wylie of Dave Wylie Restorations. Yes, they are single-paned. We get an increased R-value from the replica wooden storm windows that were made at the same time the windows were restored. Much of the glass in the old windows is the original cylinder glass from over a century ago. When the windows are clean, you can see a distortion effect in the glass, which gives you a sense of age. I suppose you could argue that this is a defect, but the effect is part of the old house experience. In my imagination, it seems as though looking through the ripples of distortion is like looking through some vision of the past captured within that imperfect, blurred view. When we bought the property, only one of our windows still

had its original sash lock, and unfortunately, the sash lock was slightly broken. As a key part of our window restoration, antique hardware of the correct age was sourced from Ed's Hardware of Stouffville to add back to the other restored windows. It is amazing how much variety there was in antique hardware, especially during the late 1800s when the most ornate buildings were constructed, the ones that people typically think of as "Victorian."

Recently I noticed that a very significant heritage house in the area had its old wood windows replaced with plain casement windows. This house, by virtue of not being in the heritage district, only near it, was not protected under heritage designation. It was only listed on the *Register of Property of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest*. No heritage permit or building permit was needed to carry out the work. Looking at the practical side of things, old windows have their issues and there are not many window restorers out there, so it is no wonder that so many property owners decide to replace wooden windows without a thought about restoring them. Many old windows are painted shut, and that is a common reason people why want to replace them. I wonder if they ever consider just breaking the paint seal with a sharp knife to help the windows operate again? In days gone by, professional house painters were also skilled in the repair of traditional wood windows. These days, replacement is the expedient solution, but the policies and guidelines of the heritage district require that traditional wood windows are retained and restored as required, to preserve an important architectural element of the district's heritage buildings. Each year, I notice window replacements quietly taking place, and I always feel regret for the loss of authenticity, but at the same time some degree of sympathy with the homeowners that get this work done.

**January 14** – Sunny and quite cold today. Mid-morning, despite a general absence of cloud cover, there were light snow flurries. As the day progressed, the temperature continued to fall until it was not very nice to be outside at all.

In many households, Friday night is pizza night, marking the end of a busy work week. Pizza is what made me think of a prominent heritage building at the north-west corner of Main Street and Highway 7. A Pizza Pizza franchise has been at this location at 4 Main Street North for years. The restaurant occupies the ground floor of a 3-storey clapboarded building that has been a landmark at this corner since Highway 7 went through Markham in the 1920s. Before the highway straightened out the jog at this intersection, the building was set among other structures and therefore not as strategically located. It may appear that this building is of frame construction, but according to old fire insurance maps, the walls are made of poured concrete. I've seen a few other nineteenth century poured concrete buildings, but they are not common. There's Pratt's Mill House at York Mills, and the David Moyer House in Dickson's Hill, for example. My earliest recollection of 4 Main Street North was when it was a real estate office. Maybe that was some time in the 1980s. Going back further in time, this distinctive building began as the combined musical instrument showroom and residence of Charles Chapman. Chapman, an English immigrant, started out his career

in his father's grocery and butcher shop in the village. By 1871, he was a dealer in pianos, organs and melodions at this location, suggesting that the building was standing at that time, two years before the formal purchase of the lot from the Speight family.

Musical instruments like the ones sold by Charles Chapman were found in many homes in Victorian Ontario, and well into the twentieth century, where families could afford them. Before TV, music was a favourite family activity. Over time, music at home has fallen out of fashion in favour of other leisure pursuits. Thinking of how the temperature will dip down to minus 16 degrees tonight, I can imagine families in years gone by gathered around a piano in the parlour, singing hymns or popular songs of the day on a cold, dark winter's evening just like this one. Maybe even in our house.

**January 15** – Too cold to go for a walk today. The motivation is lacking. I went out for a walk yesterday afternoon and it seemed that no matter which way you went, the bitter wind was in your face. Tomorrow, we return to more moderate, but still below freezing temperatures. Cold days and sunny skies seem to go together, so at least it is nice to look outside.

**January 16** – Milder today, and bright. Heading for a high of minus 5 degrees. High winds over the past weeks have brought down some long-dead ash trees. I noticed one blown over at the Esso gas station at 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Main Street. I wonder why these dead trees on commercial properties are not taken down but allowed to decay as sad reminders of this attack on our native biodiversity by an alien species of insect. In wooded areas, dead ash trees eventually fall over but are not being replaced by the municipality by new trees of a hardier species. On a recent walk through Cedar Valley, I encountered a fellow walker on the south bridge over Robinson Creek who told me about a group of beavers that took down many of the park's cedar trees a few years ago. I think I remember hearing about that. The beavers had to be relocated to another natural area. Now, the only white cedars remaining are found in the north-west corner of the park. It would be nice to see some cedars replanted to restore this wonderful, accessible greenspace. The cedars provide a valuable habitat for birds.

**January 17** – The big blizzard of 2022? Total accumulation estimated to be between 40 and 60 cm in some parts of Ontario – a record-breaker for single day snowfall. Officially, 46 cm of snow fell in Markham – that's just over a foot and a half. Snow flurries began last night about 10:00 p.m., and continued all night and well into the morning. Gusty winds created snowdrifts that were quite deep in places. By 10:00 a.m., the rate of snowfall had dropped, but more snow came down in the afternoon. Peter Street was impassible in the morning due to the depth of snow upon it. I couldn't walk to Main Street to see if it had been plowed, even with my high winter boots on. At mid-morning I measured a depth of 28 cm or 11 inches where the snow had not drifted, and 48 cm or 19 inches where it had. Bad road conditions were reported on the GTA TV news channels, and people were advised to stay at home unless it was absolutely necessary to

go out. On the other hand, this classic winter storm was beautiful to look at, and with a moderate temperature of minus 6 degrees, it was not too cold to be outside until the wind picked up. If only I had a pair of snowshoes I would have gone for a walk to really enjoy the day and immerse myself in this old-time winter scene. Once the snow plow came through, I did venture up the street to see how everything looked. Some neighbours were clearing snow, using either shovels or snowblowers. Some had not even started, perhaps waiting to be sure the last of the snowflakes had fallen. Schools, which were supposed to re-open to in-person learning today, were closed, and I expect there were many other cancellations. Around 5:00 p.m. a beautiful sunset cast a golden light on everything it touched, especially the bare trees.

**January 18** – The big clean-up from yesterday's blizzard continued today. Markham's roadways were mostly clear and easily travelled, but south of Steeles Avenue it was a different story. On a trip into North York, Bayview Avenue was snow-covered and traffic moved slowly through a maze of stranded transit buses, some stopped at curbside, and others left at odd angles in the middle of the road.

**January 19** – The full moon was very large in the sky yesterday evening when it was rising above the eastern horizon. It was pale orange in colour, looking a bit like a wheel of cheddar cheese. As it rose higher in the sky, the colour became a warm white. The first full moon of the year is traditionally called the "Wolf Moon." This was noted in the *Farmer's Almanac*. Doing a little research, I learned that this is an old term that apparently has a North American First Nations origin.<sup>5</sup> During this very cold time of year, it was said that wolves could be heard howling at the full moon, more than they normally would do.

Today was a mild one, with a temperature of plus 4 degrees melting some of the large volume of snow we received two days ago. Monday, January 17, the day after the big snow storm, was actually the first rising of the Full Wolf Moon.

**January 20** – Back to very cold weather today. Whatever snow melted yesterday is frozen solid today. City crews were on Peter Street this afternoon, clearing the sidewalk. There's a sidewalk on the east side of the street, but not on the west. Archival photographs show it was once on the west side.<sup>6</sup> I wonder why and when the sidewalk was changed, or why the Town didn't add a sidewalk to the east side and just leave the existing one on the other side in place.

**January 21** – This morning, the wind chill made it feel like minus 30 degrees. That's cold. It was bright and sunny like many of these days are. Today, rather than going out walking I was admiring the winter scene from my dining room window, and thought that I would write about Donna Knight, the Peter Street historian.

How many streets are lucky enough to have their own historian? Back in 1994, the year the Town of Markham celebrated the Bicentennial of the arrival of the Berczy settlers,



there was a Peter Street Neighbourhood Centennial Committee. Donna was a member of that committee and dedicated herself to researching the Mount Joy community and the old houses of Peter Street. She was especially interested in the Pennsylvania German Mennonite families that settled in this area in the early years of the nineteenth century. A great deal of research into land records was done to piece together the ownership history of 25 properties, including her own. The goal was to produce a booklet to celebrate the families that lived here when Peter Street was new. Eric Green, another Peter Street resident and old-house owner did the design, and the result was *Historic Peter Street*. A scaled-down version of the publication was produced in the 2000s for Doors Open Markham. In addition to looking at land records, the collection of the Markham Museum was used as a resource, as well as other archives, but a particularly valuable source of information was Donna's personal contact with members of some of the descendants of the old families. Through her contacts, archival photographs of buildings and people came to light, as well as family stories, to enrich the basic facts offered by official records. Some of the early photographs of Peter Street's old houses gathered by Donna have been used to guide the restoration of a number of Late Victorian residences on the street. Missing features, such as decorative trimwork, have been added back to some of the homes to recreate attractive details of these mostly modest village dwellings. Reading through the stories of the individual properties, you get a sense of an old-time community where many families shared the bond of a common heritage. Some of their descendants still lived locally until relatively recent times.

**January 22 & 23** - We are in the midst of a "wintery" winter. There's a substantial covering of snow that still looks white and pristine in many places, and the temperatures are cold but seasonably tolerable if proper winter attire is worn. On Sunday morning, there was a brief display of "snow globe" flurries that turned our back yard into a picture. This weekend, the parking lot of the Markville Mall was very busy. The mall, it seems, is providing people weary of COVID-19 and cold-weather confinement with a destination for an outing. A high rate of vaccination has boosted the public's confidence to go out among larger groups of people. Some of the restrictions imposed by the provincial government to slow the spread of the OMICRON variant are due to end in a few days. I perceive from news reports and conversations among people I know that the pandemic is at last receding.

**January 24** - Markham Village has one of the classic blue and bronze provincial historical markers in front of the Markham Museum: "THE FOUNDING OF MARKHAM." These iconic markers, erected by the Archaeological and Historic Sites Board, really stand out as something special. They are expensive to create because there is not only the cost of the plaque itself but of the extensive research that goes into creating the text. The province wants to be sure that there are no errors. This marker does not have a date of installation on it as far as I can see, but I think it has been there for decades. The subject suggested by the title is not the founding of Markham Township but rather the founding of Markham Village. Here is a bit of paraphrasing of

the content: The arrival of “Pennsylvania Dutch” or Pennsylvania German settlers on the Rouge just after the year 1800, and the establishment of saw and grist mills by Nicolas Miller by 1810 was the starting point for a community that evolved around this industrial hub. Joseph Reesor is credited with laying out the village plan of “Reesorville” in 1826. A post office named “Markham” opened two years later, and perhaps that is when the Reesorville name went out of common use. There’s more...but I encourage people to pay a personal visit to the plaque to get the proper sense of importance these dignified plaques impart to the reader.

Snow today. It began to fall about 10 a.m. and continued into the evening. Enough to add to and refresh what had fallen a week ago.

**January 25 – Squirrels.** This winter, I find I’m doing a lot more reading. Something I have learned very recently from all of this reading is that squirrels, of which we have many in our yard, were once uncommon. This was particularly true of black squirrels, which are the ones we mostly see around here. They are something of a nuisance at times, digging up flower bulbs and going after the bird feeders, but for the most part we peacefully co-exist with them. We also have grey squirrels and the smaller red squirrels. It’s hard to imagine there was a time when the sighting of a black squirrel was a noteworthy event. It seems that it was in the early twentieth century when squirrels became uncommon, chiefly because they were hunted for their pelts and meat. A few years ago, I was surprised and a little repulsed by finding a recipe for cooking squirrel in one of my mother’s old cookbooks from the 1940s. From my perspective, the idea of eating a squirrel would be something like eating a rat. Here’s what I found in *Pen Pictures of Early Pioneer Life in Upper Canada* by Michael Gonder Sherck, published in 1905:

“The black squirrel, which at one time was so plentiful, is very rarely seen now, excepting in the newly settled districts. They were very fond of grain, and could often be seen in large numbers in the wheat fields when the wheat was ripening...Being large, they were much sought after by the hunter for their fur and flesh, which latter, when cooked, is said to taste very much like that of a chicken. This fact, no doubt, had a great deal to do with their rapid extermination.”<sup>7</sup>

I’m not certain that it is legal to hunt squirrels today, so I think they are safe.

**January 26 –** The *Farmer’s Almanac* says this is the time to expect the January thaw. Instead, we are having quite the opposite type of weather. Yesterday evening, I was speaking to Fred Robbins about how it has become a hard winter now that we are into January. One of nature’s signs of the on-coming of a hard winter, when black walnut trees produce larger and more abundant walnuts, seems to have accurately predicted what we are now experiencing. Fred said the trees produce more walnuts to help feed the wildlife during a particularly cold and lengthy winter. I never thought of it that way. I always thought that it was about the trees producing more seeds to ensure the survival of the tree species.

**January 27** – Few birds seem to be visiting the bird feeder lately. Recent sightings include a purple finch and a white-breasted nuthatch (which I at first thought was a chickadee). Today I saw a male cardinal, and some small birds with dark grey heads, wings and tails and white bellies that I could not identify. Bird identification can be difficult when the birds move so quickly you can't get a good look at them, or when certain species share similarities in their appearance. Dirty windows don't help either.

Now that school is back to in-person learning, the roads are a lot busier, especially in the morning.

**January 28** – A very cold day with a wind chill in the morning in the range of minus 30 degrees. Drivers were greeted this morning by a jump in the price of gasoline to \$151.9 per litre. News reports called this a record, but I believe that is only for this year. I'm sure the prices were higher for a while some years ago. There are all sorts of reasons given for the escalation in gas prices, starting with the standard principle of supply and demand but also taking into account other factors such as the crisis in Ukraine over a potential military invasion by Russia. Actually, the price of everything has increased during the lengthy COVID-19 pandemic, especially noticeable when checking out at the grocery store. This shows how world events like the geo-political tensions in Ukraine can affect people's daily lives everywhere, even here in Markham Village. I suppose the same was true during World War One and World War Two, even before we had the interconnectivity of globalization and the internet.

**January 29** – Continuing very cold. In the afternoon, in spite of a temperature of minus 11 degrees and a windchill of minus 20, I took a walk through Cedar Valley Park. A narrow path had been tramped down through the deep snow. The creek was not frozen over, but there were areas of thin ice on its margins. It was very quiet in the valley. There were no birds to be seen or heard, only the sound of a solitary squirrel busy at something. It was good to get out of the house. I was dressed for it.

I decided to look into the story of Nicholas Miller, who is noted on THE FOUNDING OF MARKHAM provincial historical marker, out of interest in his role as a founder of Markham Village. Joseph Reesor, who laid out the village plan, got the credit for being the founder in Mitchell and Co.'s directory. I consulted pages 72-73, 116 and 122 of *Markham 1793-1900* and learned that Nicholas Miller was one of the earliest settlers on Yonge Street in Markham Township after having arrived in the little Town of York with his wife, Sara Chapman, in 1793.<sup>8</sup> They established their homestead in an area that would later become known as Langstaff, north of Thornhill. Nicholas Miller was of German parentage, and came to Upper Canada from Pennsylvania, but he was not of the traditional Pennsylvania German Mennonite culture. In 1806 he purchased a property that is now the Milne Dam Conservation Area. On the Rouge River that runs through the property, Miller built saw and grist mills some time prior to 1810. By 1826, this property came under the ownership of the Milne family of millers, from whom the park takes its name. I wonder what compelled Nicholas Miller to purchase a property

and establish mills so distant from his homestead on Yonge Street. Who operated the mills? Did Miller oversee the operation of the mills at all, or did he engage someone to do the job? The Rouge River in this location provided a prime mill site. In the first few years of the nineteenth century, Pennsylvania German families began to establish farms in the eastern part of Markham Township. Was Nicholas Miller acquainted with any of them? Was it his intent to provide an industrial centre to serve this fledgling community of Pennsylvania Germans, in much the same way German Mills was established to provide a centre for the Berczy Settlers? Without the records to shed light on these questions, they must remain as speculation on my part.

**January 30** – It seems that there is more to learn about Nicholas Miller. I found my copy of *Thornhill – An Ontario Village* by Doris M. FitzGerald, published in 1964, and read that Nicholas Miller was a millwright, brought to Upper Canada by Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe in 1793 to construct a government sawmill on the Humber River.<sup>9</sup> This was the King's Saw Mill, the location of which is commemorated in King's Mill Park, Etobicoke. The mill supplied lumber for the construction of government buildings including fortifications, and for ship-building. In contrast to what is written in *Markham 1793-1900*, FitzGerald wrote that Miller had come from Genesee, New York, however in her later book, *Old Time Thornhill*, published in 1970, she wrote that Nicholas Miller came from Pennsylvania. Another point of interest in *Thornhill – An Ontario Village*, Doris FitzGerald wrote about Simcoe and a party of men (soldiers?) returning to York following an exploratory visit to Lake Simcoe assisting the Miller family in the erection of a log house on their assigned lot, to replace the family's temporary structure.

This weekend there was a large demonstration in Ottawa against government measures to slow the spread of COVID-19. The protest began in British Columbia with a convoy of truckers travelling to the Nation's Capitol, but quickly attracted other people with issues relating to the rights of the individual as opposed to the interest of the common good.

**January 31** – Milder temperatures predicted for this week, with snow beginning by late Wednesday, and going into Thursday. Some of the large volume of accumulated snow went down while the temperatures were mild, but when this week's snowstorm comes along, it will build it back up.

**February 1 – The Lunar New Year.** I most often hear people refer to the Lunar New Year as Chinese New Year. This is the Year of the Tiger. With the City of Markham's population made up of diverse cultures, many families will be celebrating this week. The arrival of a significant group of families from Hong Kong in the 1980s -1990s was an important trend that was key in Markham's journey to become Canada's most diverse city. Families from other Asian and South Asian nations, plus other countries, have added to the City's diversity and continue to do so. Today marks the beginning of Black History Month. I noted the story of Susannah Maxwell, who historically lived on the Markham Township side of the Village of Richmond Hill, and was featured by the

Richmond Hill Historical Society on their website. Susannah and her family came to Canada in the 1850s via the Underground Railway. When she passed away in 1923 at the age of 117, Mrs. Maxwell was believed to have been Canada's oldest citizen.

**February 2** – Today was Groundhog Day, with several different groundhogs in several places in North America making their predictions about how much more winter we can expect to endure. Our nearest weather-predicting groundhog is Wiarton Willie. This morning he came out of his little house and did not see his shadow. By popular wisdom this is a sign of an early spring, which would be most welcome considering the type of winter we have been having since the New Year began. Another big snowstorm was forecast to reach us today, coming from the U.S. Wet snow began around the noon hour, followed by steady snowfall in the mid-afternoon. A dark-eyed junco visited the bird feeder today. My son James identified this bird, which I had spotted a few days ago but could not figure out what it was. Mystery solved!

**February 3** – The snow that started in the afternoon and continued into the evening did not amount to much after all. Overnight, the city's Operations staff did a good job of clearing Main Street of snow and slippery spots. As it turned out, the heaviest snowfall was to the west of this region. The lights blinked a couple of times during our dinner, and it looked as though the power might go out, but fortunately that didn't happen. Today, a crew from the hydro commission were on the street clipping branches of any trees that could engage with the power lines in the event of strong winds or a heavy load of ice and snow. Maybe someone called in a complaint about the blinking lights. This morning, the tree branches were nicely frosted with thick snow like piping on a gingerbread cookie, which may have been enhanced by the rain and sleet that began to fall around mid-day yesterday. This effect livened up the bare branches of trees and shrubs around the house and on the street, lending an artistic look to ordinary things and giving a cheerful feeling on a grey day in February. I'm reminded of some of the winter landscapes painted by members of the Group of Seven, thinking of Lawren Harris in particular. He did some winter street scenes with old houses in Toronto in an early phase of his artistic career. I'm thinking in of *Winter Afternoon, 1918* and *Red House in Winter, 1919*.

**February 4** – This evening, the opening ceremony of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games was televised on the CBC. Due to the difference in time zones, the actual ceremony took place earlier, during the day. Some events, such as curling and hockey, began a couple of days ago. It would be interesting to know how many of Canada's Olympic athletes come from Markham.

Temperatures remained cold for the next couple of days.

**February 5** – Going through Thursday's *Economist & Sun*, I found the obituary of John Lachlan Cattanach (1926-2022), the founder of a prominent law firm in Markham Village. Lachlan Cattanach, Q.C. was the son of John Arpad Cattanach and Evelyn

Cameron. The Cattanach family moved from Toronto to Markham Village while their son, who went by the name Lachlan, was still attending public school. In 1944, John A. Cattanach purchased the former home of local merchant Ernest H. Crosby at 52 Main Street North. This dignified 1910 red brick residence in the Queen Anne Revival style, with its distinctive corner turret, became Lachlan Cattanach's law office. Today the firm is known as Cattanach Hindson Sutton Van Veldhuizen LLP, Barristers and Solicitors. According to the obituary, Lachlan Cattanach practiced law in Markham Village for almost 70 years. Mr. Cattanach, who passed away at the grand old age of 96, was a founding member of the local Kiwanis Club, a long-time chair of the Board of Trustees of St. Andrew's United Church, and played a key role in the establishment of the Markham Stouffville Hospital.

In the same edition of the *Economist & Sun* (February 3, 2022), there was a birthday tribute to Ashmore Reesor. He celebrated his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday on February 2. Mr. Reesor is a long-time resident of Cedar Grove. During his lifetime so far, he has seen Markham go from a primarily agricultural community into the ever-growing, diverse city it is today. His corner of the world still reflects, in many ways, the Markham of old, but within view are some of the big changes of recent times. I'm thinking in particular of Highway 407 and the southernmost neighbourhood of the Cornell community, which is gradually expanding into the agricultural lands towards Reesor Road. Much of this yet to be developed land has been home to many generations of Reesors. The Reesor family, by staying on the land through the challenges of government expropriations and the ever-looming shadow of urban development, must be given credit for maintaining a continued presence of the Pennsylvania-German culture in Markham and Stouffville.

**February 6** – A welcome return to more seasonal temperatures. Big things are happening this weekend, too big not to mention even though the local impact is minimal:

Today marks Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee – 70 years on the throne makes her the longest-reigning British monarch. At 95 years of age, the Queen's role has been scaled back, but she soldiers on as head of the Commonwealth, still fulfilling many of her duties. I'm not aware of any planned events to mark this milestone in Canada, but this event makes me think of the pressed glass plates that were produced to mark Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 that you sometimes see at antique stores or in historic house museums.

Ottawa remains under what can only be described as a siege by protesters demanding an end to all measures imposed to control the COVID-19 pandemic. At present there does not seem to be a path to resolving this occupation of the Nation's Capitol. The tone of this protest seems reminiscent of last year's unprecedented events at the U.S. Capital in Washington.

In the afternoon, three members of the family went for a walk in Springdale Park. People had made a path through the deep snow on the Forest Therapy Trail, but it was a little uneven in places. I could feel the warmth of the sun on my back, but at the same time a chilly wind numbed my face. At first, we didn't see much in the way of wildlife, but just as we were leaving the trail, a group of chickadees sang and twittered in some tall, dense shrubs. On our way home, we noted the price of gasoline at our local gas station. It was \$1.59.9 a litre for regular. The price of gasoline has risen more sharply than predicted a couple of weeks ago. Where will it be at by the summer?

**February 7** – Brilliant sun, brilliant white snow. A day to wear sunglasses outdoors to minimize the glare. This week's milder temperatures were correctly predicted by *Harrowsmith's Almanac*. Today, we had a high of plus 2 degrees. Icicles along the eaves on the south side of the house were dripping as they melted. Every once in a while, a couple let go and fell to the ground. It might seem like spring is coming but it's too soon for that. In the mid-afternoon, James and I walked through Cedar Valley Park. By that time the sky had clouded over and it was only plus 1. Numerous squirrels were busy in the wooded areas, but bird activity was minimal, with the exception of a woodpecker hammering away somewhere nearby. We first heard him from the east side of the valley, and eventually saw him working away at a dead tree on the west side of the park.

**February 8** – The other day I wondered about how many athletes from Markham were competing in the Winter Olympics. I asked the question through the City's website and today I received a reply from Natasha at the Contact Centre. According to the Mayor's twitter account we have Josh Ho-Sang (Men's Hockey), Paul Poirier (Figure Skating with Piper Gilles in Ice Dancing) and Roman Sadovsky (Figure Skating). I wish each of them success. Just imagine the hours, days, months and years that go into bringing Olympic athletes to this ultimate competition.

**February 10** – Mild today. The temperature reached plus 6 degrees. The icicles on our south eaves melted away drip-by-drip. The news has been dominated with the growing anti-vaccine mandate protests. Fortunately, things are peaceful here in Markham Village. I have not seen placards in the hands of protesters, or signs on people's lawns or vehicles. No farm tractors or transport trucks are blocking our streets, except by chance and not relating to anyone protesting anything. I've been careful not to discuss this issue with neighbours. You don't always know what side of the political fence your neighbours might be on. Best to stay neighbourly with neighbours.

For various reasons I have not done as many of my wanderings through the village lately. The weather has had a lot to do with it. I know spring weather is still a few weeks away, but each day takes us a little closer to the end of winter.

**February 11** – Construction has started on a townhouse development in Vinegar Hill, the biggest change that neighbourhood has seen in a while. The location is an odd-shaped parcel of land at 73 Main Street South, at Mill Street. It's a vacant lot that

overlooks the Rouge Valley, and it once contained a small house that has been gone for a very long time. The house was on the Mill Street side of the property, according to Plan 18 (1850). When an archaeological assessment was done, traces of rubbish from the occupation of the site were found, but the foundations of the building were determined to have been destroyed by later site works, perhaps relating to road reconstruction. There used to be a poured concrete retaining wall at the corner with the date "1947" impressed in it. That little piece of Main Street history was removed when the bridge spanning the valley was replaced a few years ago. To build the blocks of townhouses, some clever engineering will be employed to work with the varying topography of the property. The hill on the Main Street side needs to be cut down in height and some heavy-duty retaining walls will have to be installed next to neighbouring properties. Excavation of the hill is what I recently noticed as a sign that things are happening on the site. Although there already are townhouses just south of this neighbourhood, they are not in the heritage district and they are oriented east-west, which sets them apart as a separate entity. This new development is within the heritage district, which contains an eclectic mix of single-family homes. The townhouses will be different from the long-established character of old Vinegar Hill, especially on Main Street where the few heritage buildings in this area are found. When the townhouses are done, Main Street will be more urban in appearance. Thus continues the on-going process of change in this long-established part of Markham Village.

**February 12** – A cool, dull day, with some snow in the earlier part, and rain later. A good day to delve into matters of local historical interest. Around the corner from the new townhouse development that I wrote about yesterday stands a very interesting old building at 17 Mill Street. The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) is the owner of this small stucco house, which is cottage-like in appearance due to its scale and balcony-like front verandah. It dates from about 1860 and sits atop a high fieldstone foundation that was built into a natural slope. The foundation is so tall that it forms a lower storey. Why this house was built in this way can only be guessed at, but for much of its early history, it was home to a carpet weaver named Edward Carr and his wife, Bridget. Like many of their neighbours in Vinegar Hill, the family came from Ireland. It is possible that the lower level was where the workshop was located, and that the artisan and his family lived upstairs. Carr purchased the property from Archibald Barker in 1877, but may have lived there for some time before then. After Edward Carr died in 1894, it appears that the carpet-weaving business continued under Sarah Ryan, a neighbour, based on an advertisement in the *Markham Economist*. I wonder what kinds of carpets were made here. Based on the scale of the operation, the carpets must have been woven on a large wooden loom rather than the sophisticated weaving machines like the ones you can see at Upper Canada Village. Were they utilitarian and simple, or were they ornamented with patterns and colours? I can only guess.

Carr's descendants owned the property until 1918. In recent years, after being vacant for some time, the TRCA leased the house to a non-profit organization called 360 Degrees Kids.<sup>10</sup> This organization, based in Richmond Hill, provides programmes and



support to families and safe and supportive housing for homeless and at-risk youth in York Region. With the help of donations of material and technical expertise, renovations were done to bring the building back to a habitable state to serve as a residence for youth that can no longer live at home. This project is an excellent example of a surplus heritage structure being preserved through a creative approach to adaptive re-use.

Today, the provincial government declared a Provincial State of Emergency in response to the escalating border crossing blockades and occupation of the parliamentary precinct in Ottawa by the so-called freedom protest. Who could imagine this state of aggression against our elected government and citizens occurring in Canada?

**February 12 – 13** – In the early morning hours, the family was awakened by a strong, strange smell in the front part of the house. It didn't smell like natural gas, and was not coming from the furnace room, though the smell was very potent in the basement bedroom. When I opened the front door, it became obvious that the smell was coming from outside, which we traced to the front garden. There has been a lot of rabbit activity out there lately. The conclusion: a skunk had sprayed some animal in front of our basement and living room windows. By morning, the smell inside had mostly gone away, but I could still detect it while looking around the garden in the light of day.

Today it is bright, but it is unpleasant to be outside due to a cold, sharp wind from the west. This I learned while installing some protective wire fencing around a couple of the damaged shrubs. The wind has been quite gusty at times, which hastened my work so I could return indoors as soon as possible. The colder than seasonal temperatures are forecast to last all weekend. A bright spot on both Saturday and Sunday was an American goldfinch visiting the bird feeder. Such striking colouring.

The Superbowl was on TV on Sunday evening. This has become a really big international entertainment event, with the pre-show, half-time show, clever commercials and of course the game itself. I am sure many of my fellow villagers were also watching. This year's teams were the Los Angeles Rams vs. the Cincinnati Bengals, playing in Los Angeles, California. A close game, with the Rams winning 23 to 20 in the final couple of minutes after lagging behind the Bengals for much of the game.

**February 14 – Valentine's Day.** The morning began bitterly cold at daybreak. Although the temperature was minus 15 degrees, not the coldest we've experienced this winter, the wind chill made it feel like minus 30. This was the coldest I have felt in a while. It is my understanding that in winter, when you have clear skies as we had today, the temperature tends to be the coldest. With today being Valentine's Day, no doubt local restaurants were as busy as they could be with capacity limits imposed by the COVID-19 restrictions. We had dinner at home. This year there were cards and chocolates but no flowers.

Today was Hazel McCallion's 101<sup>st</sup> birthday. In a ceremony held in honour of Mississauga's former long-time mayor, Premier Doug Ford announced that a new LRT line, the Hurontario Line, will now be named the Hazel McCallion Line after her. Hazel McCallion reminds me in some ways of the story of our own former reeve and mayor, Alma Walker, both of them extraordinary women who made great gains for women in politics in their time.

**February 15** – The news reported this morning that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has invoked the Emergencies Act to enable law enforcement to deal more effectively with the people who have been occupying Ottawa's Parliamentary Precinct and others who have blockaded border crossings. This Act is the re-named and revamped War Measures Act, the one used by our Prime Minister's late father, Pierre Elliott Trudeau during the October Crisis of 1970 in the Province of Quebec. The well-organized and very vocal Freedom Convoy protesters, who have effectively disrupted the peaceful operation of the entire country, made me think of another group of people who opposed the policies of the government of their day, the Upper Canadian rebels of 1837. This thought inspired me to pull out my copy of *Markham 1793-1900* to scan through the list of Reform party supporters in 1834 to look for names of residents of Markham Village and vicinity who were aligned with the politics of William Lyon Mackenzie.<sup>11</sup> Here's a few that I recognized: Jacob Wiser, T. McKenna, William Workman, Harry Clarry, Ambrose Noble, Peter Ramer, Joseph Reesor, John Reesor, and Richard Sylvester.

**February 16** – With a high of plus 8 degrees in Markham, and plus 10 in Toronto, the temperatures are record-setters for this date according to weather reports I have heard. Earlier, around lunch time, it felt much like a nice day in March. A warmish, somewhat blustery wind was blowing from the south-west. From inside the house, we could hear chunks of ice and snow falling off the roof with a loud rumble and crash. By mid-afternoon, the sun had gone, and with it my motivation to go out for a walk. Listening to commentators on the TV news, there is a general feeling that we are coming to the end of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and most of the restrictions that have gone along with it. This is very good news as the winter season is beginning to wind down and the coming of spring seems closer now, even with the fluctuating temperatures we have been experiencing.

For two days, the price of regular gasoline has been \$161.9 per litre.

**February 17** – Steady rain for much of the night decreased the volume of snow on the ground and left large pockets of pooled water. A snowstorm began in the late afternoon as the temperature fell and we returned to below freezing. Anywhere from 10 to 25 centimetres were expected. Such variable weather this month, with the temperatures fluctuating every couple of days between above and below freezing. All this while Parliament debates the Emergencies Act. A good news story is the gold medal awarded to the Canadian Women's Hockey Team thanks to their win over the U. S. team at the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics.

**February 18** – It snowed through the night, and in the morning the landscape was refreshed with a marshmallow-like coating of smooth white snow. The snowfall around here was not as much as expected, so it was nothing like the previous big storm that shut down many roads for a time, including Peter Street. The main roads today were snow-covered at first, but must have been plowed at least once during the night, so getting around was not a problem. The sun was shining brightly and in a matter of hours our little taste of the on-coming of spring was transformed back into the cold and snow of winter.

**February 19** – Quite a blizzard came up in the late morning. It was a surprise because it was not in the forecast. Driving between Markham Village and Stouffville became a little treacherous due to the light snow from last night being blown across the highway from the open fields by a strong, gusty wind from the west. It felt much colder than the minus 8 degrees it actually was due to the bitter wind. Gusts were up to 81 kmh, and a strong wind was sustained for a long time. The blizzard was short-lived, only lasting about an hour, and was followed by periods of sunshine. When you hear the wind buffeting the house and see it blow streamers of fine snow off of the rooftops, it makes you realize how lucky you are to be in the warm shelter of your home.

**February 20** – Looking around the yard, the effects of this hard winter are evident in the degree of damage that hungry rabbits (and maybe other animals) have done to our shrubs. The number of shrubs with bark stripped and branches chewed off is much greater than I originally thought. Only the plants with protective fencing have remained relatively untouched. We can't fence everything. Some of our plants may not come back to life in the spring.

Today marked the close of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics. Canadian athletes won a total of 26 medals, 4 of them gold. At the same time, Russia seems poised to launch an invasion of Ukraine any day now. The first shots have been fired by Russian-backed separatists in an attempt to draw a response from Ukrainian forces in order to provide President Putin with justification to make his move. These are very uneasy times. In Canada, progress has been made in clearing the blockade in Ottawa but there is still potential for new blockades to appear.

In the mid-afternoon, I walked along the railway line past the train station, then west along Station Street on my way to Cedar Valley Park. The sun was shining and I could feel its warmth, which to me was a sign of returning spring. Robinson Creek was flowing fast and was near to spilling over its banks. The sound of the water rushing by and the wind whispering through the bare trees were the only sounds I heard, as birds seemed to be absent or inactive at that time. One lone black squirrel up in a tree was the only wildlife I encountered on my walk. People were scarce too, although it was pleasant to be in the shallow valley, out of the wind. I expected to see more

fellow-walkers tired of being confined indoors. At last, I passed two silent walkers doing a round of the trail that circles the wetlands, then I was on my way home.

**February 21 – Family Day.** There was a time when the Heritage Canada Foundation, now the Heritage Trust for Canada, was lobbying to have the third Monday in February declared Heritage Day as a holiday, in recognition of the nation's history. In the end, at least in Ontario, the holiday was declared, but named Family Day instead. I don't think that Premier McGinty was much interested in history or heritage conservation. Notwithstanding that, this week in February still is a focus for heritage awareness thanks to the continued efforts of the Heritage Trust for Canada and the Ontario Heritage Trust to promote Heritage Week. Many communities celebrate this week with displays relating to local heritage or other programmes that remind people of the legacy of our forebears. Markham traditionally has placed an exhibit in the Great Hall of the Civic Centre to draw attention to the City's cultural heritage conservation activities. In addition, the Prince of Wales flag is flown in recognition that Markham was the first recipient of the prestigious Prince of Wales Prize for Heritage Conservation, awarded by the Heritage Canada Foundation in the year 2000.

This was a fine, warmish day for late February. In the afternoon, the sun was shining in a blue sky and everywhere snow and ice were melting. The sidewalks, hemmed in by snowbanks on either side, were like canals, full of meltwater in the low spots. In Tannery Pond Park, Robinson Creek flowed with even more vigour than yesterday, and was very wide as it meandered toward the Robinson Street bridge. In one of the trees at the southern entrance to the park, I saw a black squirrel with a white-tipped tail, a skunk imposter! Outside of the coffee shop that faces the "Town Square" parking lot, local architect Stefano Di Giulio was enjoying coffee and sunshine with his family, taking full advantage of this Family Day afternoon and the southern exposure of the outdoor seating area.

**February 22 –** An overcast day, a little above the freezing mark. In the afternoon it rained, but not too heavily. The snow now has a tired look that makes dull February days like this one feel a little melancholy. I've been trying to distract myself by reading. This afternoon I finished Peter McArthur's *In Pastures Green*, originally published in 1915 but re-issued in a very nice edited version in 1948. The author's descriptions of rural life, as he experienced it on his small farm in Southwestern Ontario, transported me to his world of "spacious days" and "serene hours."

This morning's news was not good. After weeks of uncertainty, Russian forces have moved into two separatist regions of Ukraine. It is feared that this is the first stage of a further invasion of Ukrainian territory, the wider implications of which are troubling for the security of Eastern Europe. It seems to me that this is one of those days that will mark a period of significant change in world history.

**February 23** – The only things to say about today is how cold and windy it has been. The temperature was minus 5 degrees, but the wind chill made it feel like minus 15. It got colder as the morning progressed and the wind increased. A bitter west wind blew at 50 kmh, with gusts up to 72 kmh. Cold, cold, cold.

**February 24** – Sunny but cold again. At least the wind is not so strong today. American goldfinches were visiting the bird feeder. They are the only birds I have seen there lately. I heard the call of a cardinal this morning from the cedars, but did not see one at the feeder.

A sad day for the state of the world. Russia has launched a full-scale, destructive attack on Ukraine. The president of Russia is unaffected by the threat of sanctions, and has made bold statements and threats against all who might oppose his actions. As I write these words, I realize that I am straying from my principal theme of life in Markham Village. It goes to show that even far-off events impact our lives no matter where we live.

Now, a pleasant change of topic: Jane's Walk events for 2022. Jane's Walks are held in honour of the memory of Jane Jacobs, a passionate advocate for healthy, livable urban places. The walks occur over three days on a May weekend closest to her birthday. I have led Jane's Walks in various parts of the City of Markham on a number of occasions. The pandemic put a pause on this annual event, but with things opening up again, Jane's Walks are back. I have been asked to conduct a walk this spring, and I think I will hold it here in Markham Village. I'll talk about how development has changed Markham Village since the beginning of its history, and continues to do so today. There are many examples from the past, the not-so-distant past and from recent times. The working title is Markham Village – A Developing Story.

**February 25** – Another snowstorm. The roads were in terrible shape this morning, hardly cleared, if at all. A sharp wind blew from the north-west, making it feel intensely cold. The bird feeder was busy though – my son James saw a female cardinal, a dark-eyed junco, and some chickadees, all enjoying seeds and nuts around the same time in the morning. The afternoon was clear and remained cold.

**February 26** – Mid-morning, while we were driving west on Highway 407, between Markham Road and McCowan Road, my daughter Jessica spotted nine white-tailed deer in several places in the greenspace to the north of the highway. Of the nine, there was a family group with a fawn. This greenspace is part of the Milne Dam Conservation Park.

**February 27** – As I wrote these words just before 11:00 a.m. on Sunday morning, light snow flurries suddenly turned into a blizzard, which lasted about 45 minutes. I watched this dramatic turn in the weather from my dining room window while thinking about how some of the streets in Markham Village have changed over the years. A few years

ago, while researching the history of properties in the village using old land records, I came upon the origin of Centre Street, a smaller street in the heart of the commercial area. Centre Street does not appear on the oldest available map of the village, Plan 18, 1850, but it does appear on the map of Markham Village in Miles & Co.'s *Historical Atlas of York County*, 1878. Centre Street was added to break up the long block between the sideroad that became known as Wellington Street (later, Highway 7) and Joseph Street. According to what I found in the Abstract Index of Deeds for Plan 18, the Corporation of the Village of Markham purchased the right-of-way for Centre Street in 1875; one part from James McCreight and the other from Chauncey Crosby.

There are two heritage buildings standing on this street. The former home and office of Dr. Willard Blandin, an early dentist in the village, stands at 8 Centre Street. It dates from *circa* 1885, and is a one and a half storey brick building with an entrance facing Centre Street, and another entrance facing Main Street. One entrance must have served the family, and the other, Dr. Blandin's patients. The doctor owned the property until 1920. The other heritage building on the street is a frame double house at 10/12 Centre Street, built *circa* 1886 by David Meyer, a prominent local builder based in Mount Joy. With its mansard roof and dormers, it is a good example of the Second Empire Style, noteworthy for its excellent state of preservation. It appears to have been constructed as a rental property. Today both units serve as commercial offices. Across the street to the east there is a much-altered old house that looks like it started out looking similar to the double house at 10/12 Centre Street. The address is 23 Washington Street. In recent times, some of the earlier character of this house has been restored through the removal of modern aluminum siding and the restoration of the original vertical tongue and groove wood siding that was safely sealed away underneath. The mansard roof has been clad in wood shingles. Research suggests the house was built *circa* 1885. During the late nineteenth century it was home to the family of Walter (a.k.a. Waldegrave) Tane, a shoe-maker who had previously worked as a carriage painter. I think he may have worked for Samuel Wilson, who rented the house to Tane before he became the owner.

**February 28** – A chilly last day of February, especially in the morning. There's been a run of unseasonably cold temperatures lately. Speaking for myself, I'm tired of the cold and snow, but I'm sure many others feel the same. At least the days have been getting longer. The rabbits (and maybe other animals) have become so desperate for food due to the persistent deep snow cover that they have nibbled away the needles from the lowest branches of some of our evergreen shrubs. Come springtime, we'll see the full extent of damage done to our plants. Some have been stripped of so much bark that they have been girdled, which kills them off.

**March 1** – Milder today, but a dull grey sky made it feel a little gloomy. Despite that, it was a good day to walk into the heart of the village to deliver a book to Russ Gregory, the custom home designer/builder, at his office at 16 Church Street. On the way I was thinking how pleasant it is to live in a village where you can walk to most places in a matter of minutes. There is much variety in the streetscape in a place that has grown

and evolved over nearly two centuries. It's easy to find your way around because the historic street pattern is a sensible, interconnected grid. When I arrived at the office, no one was around so I turned around and headed north on George Street, past the village green (Morgan Park), all the way up to Ramona Boulevard. I took a moment to admire the stately old Robinson farmhouse at 14 Ramona, then made my way back to Main Street and home.

**March 2** – The first half of the day was mild and bright, not as mild as yesterday in terms of temperature, but feeling warmer due to calm winds and sunshine. Meltwater on the sidewalks was an indication of the snow and ice beginning to thaw. The afternoon, when I went out for a walk, was not as nice as the morning. The sky had clouded over and the air had a slight chill to it. I decided to walk up Main Street in my own neighbourhood of Mount Joy. I went to have a closer look at an old gatepost that I recently noticed in front of 323 Main Street North. This gatepost, made of old-fashioned poured concrete, is square-shaped with a square cap, and is rather thin in proportion. Bits of rusted hardware remain on the side facing the driveway. The gatepost seems to be the lone survivor of a long-vanished front yard fence. Time has given it a bit of lean to one side. The house on the property was built by the Reaman family about 1891. It has an odd look to it because of its mix of cladding materials that appear to have been added in the early twentieth century, some years after the original date of construction. The ground floor is clad in a distinctive patterned concrete block, while the upper floor is shingled. I've heard that a member of the Reaman family still lives there.

In historic times, many of the properties on Main Street would have had front yard fences. They show up in archival photographs. There were wood fences, wire fences and combinations of the two. Today, only a handful of properties on the street have picket fences. I like to see houses with ornamental fences out front because it reflects what, in my mind, a village street should look like.

**March 3** – Arctic air has kept our temperatures cold. Minus 8 degrees was today's high, with a cold wind from the west making it feel more intense. Clear and sunny. After lunch I noted the price of regular gas at the local Esso station had risen to \$166.9 per litre.

The biggest change to Main Street in Markham Village in recent years was the construction of a large mixed use development on the site of the Markham Village Shoppes. The old plaza, dating from the 1960s or 1970s, was built on a mews plan and had a lot of vacant space near the end of its life, especially the shops fronting onto the courtyard, which were invisible from the street. The new building, constructed in 2014, was designed to take advantage of the natural topography of the west side of Main Street, where the land drops off toward the floodplain of Robinson Creek. Its U-shape creates a south-facing courtyard. In terms of design, the lower section of the complex reflects a Victorian Revival aesthetic, which was the result of collaboration between the developer, his architect John Beresford, and City staff. The new flat-fronted block of

commercial spaces, with residential units over top, is a homage to the traditional business blocks of small-town Ontario, and helps to reinforce and enhance the heritage buildings of the commercial core of the village. An opening mid-block, resembling a carriageway, provides access to the courtyard from the street. The taller portion of the complex, set back from the street, has a reduced impact from a streetscape perspective because of the way the rear of the site drops in height from Main Street. Here, the design does not have the Victorian styling, but instead is somewhat reminiscent of early twentieth century warehouses. The crowning glory of the development, addressed 68 Main Street North, is a Second Cup coffee shop at the corner next to the vehicular entrance to the property. An informal patio brings life to the street when the weather is good enough for patrons to be able to sit outside comfortably. This is one of the best examples of infill development in a commercial heritage district that I have seen. The architecture does not attempt to create replicas of heritage buildings, but rather uses some of the same design language to create a compatible neighbour to genuine heritage buildings in the vicinity.

**March 4** – The price for regular gasoline has risen to \$174.9 per litre, as predicted yesterday. From here, where will it go? Who knows. Yesterday my neighbour Carl Amatuzio, the stained glass artist who lives at 10 Peter Street, said he didn't drive much due to the high cost of gas. He went on to say, as he went to pick up his mail, that he walks to the local grocery stores, The Garden Basket and No Frills. Both stores are indeed walkable, being just north of Sixteenth Avenue. Getting back to the idea of the walkable village I wrote about a few days ago, shopping close at hand is an advantage of this type of community. The only issue is that you can only carry so much in the way of groceries if you are walking. Or if the kind of store you need moves or goes out of business.

**March 5** – This morning I attended the funeral of Charles Donald (Don) Brodie at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Markham Village. The Brodie family has a long history in Whitchurch and Markham Townships. Don grew up on a farm south of the mill village of Headford, on the east side of Leslie Street. He was born in 1934 and was a descendant of Christian Henricks, who is believed to have come to Markham with William Berczy in 1794, one of a small number of people from the U.S. that joined the Berczy settlers as they made their way to Upper Canada. Today, the Brodie farm is located in the eastern part of Richmond Hill, but historically the area was in Markham Township. Don and his sister Cora moved from the family farm to a house in Markham several years ago. I made measured drawings of the floorplan and architectural details of the Henricks-Brodie House, 1834, before the family moved out. Although not residents of Markham Village, the Brodies lived in the general vicinity of the village. Don was a member of the Markham Lions and St. Andrew's United Church. He served on the Markham Fair Board for a number of years, and appears in a group photograph of the board members taken on the Centennial Anniversary of the fair in 1955 in *Markham Remembered*.<sup>12</sup> At the service, friends spoke about Don's gregarious nature and his love of gospel singing and travel.



I asked Fred Robbins if he had any family history on the Brodie family, based on their Whitchurch Township connection. I was in luck. He had a book in his collection titled *Craigieburn Farm – The Saga of an early Canadian Pioneer Family*, by Alex A. Brodie, written in 1903. The George Brodie family came to Upper Canada in 1835 from Peterhead, Scotland. This family history, based on the memories of George Brodie's son, is a detailed account of an immigrant family's experience and makes fascinating reading. George Brodie bought a farm on Lot 2, Concession V, Whitchurch Township in 1835 that contained a hewn log house and a small log barn. The location was south of the hamlet of Bethesda, on the east side of what is known today as Warden Avenue. Charles T. Brodie, a descendant of George Brodie, purchased the Henricks farm in Markham Township in 1903. His son, Charles N. S. Brodie later married Rose Henricks. Donna Knight, the Peter Street historian, told me that there once was a Brodie family on Peter Street. I'm not sure how or if this Brodie family connects with Don Brodie's branch.

**March 6** – Exceptionally warm today, with a high of 15 degrees. The warmth was accompanied by high winds from the west, gusting up to 70 kmh. The family took a walk through Cedar Valley Park in the morning before the wind became too strong. Robinson Creek was flowing fast and wide from the meltwater and last night's rain. As we walked home, my son James spotted a robin sharing a small tree on Backus Court with a bright red cardinal.

Regular gasoline is now at \$1.84.9 per litre.

**March 7** – A dull day with ice pellets falling in the morning and a light snowfall in the afternoon. Not a day for going out.

Right across the street from St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, where Don Brodie's funeral was held on the weekend, is the Dixon-Garland Funeral Home. Like many funeral homes in small communities, this one is located in a large old house that has been a landmark on Main Street since it was built in 1873. Originally, this was the home of Senator David Reesor, founder of the *Markham Economist* newspaper, appointed to the Senate of the new Dominion of Canada in 1867. Reesor was a prominent citizen of the village, with an impressive list of accomplishments in addition to his role as a Canadian senator.<sup>13</sup> He was a member of the local school board, agricultural society, and York County Council. In 1860, David Reesor was elected to the Legislative Assembly. His earlier home was destroyed in the fire of 1872 that devastated a significant portion of the upper east side of Markham Village. David Reesor's second home was designed to impress: a tall, two storey buff brick building rendered in the Gothic Revival style, set well back from Main Street. The large setback allowed for an expansive front lawn and a measure of privacy. Before long, he moved to the village of Yorkville and sold his Markham Village home to Garrett Vanzant in 1876. Vanzant, a hardware dealer on Main Street, was a shareholder in the Speight Wagon Company and was elected as its

president in 1882. He was elected reeve of Markham Village in 1883-1884, 1888 and 1890. I think that David Reesor was a business partner in Vanzant & Reesor Hardware Stoves and Tinware that once stood at 85 Main Street North, a business documented in an archival photograph in *Markham Remembered*.<sup>14</sup> I have tried to find documentation to support this idea, but so far, I have not been able to confirm that David Reesor was the Reesor referred to on the sign shown on the archival photograph.

In 1956, this fine old residence became the Dixon Funeral Home. Don Garland later became a partner in Dick Dickson's business and the name was changed to the Dixon-Garland Funeral Home. Additions and alterations have been made to Senator Reesor's former home over the years, but it still retains much of its original character. Archival photographs show that the gables once had elegant Gothic Revival bargeboards, and there was a spacious front porch. Fieldstone gateposts on Main Street are remnants of a long-vanished front yard fence.

**March 8** – International Women's Day. Had lunch in Unionville with some former work colleagues from the City of Markham. On my way back home, instead of taking Bullock Drive, I decided to drive up Main Street from Highway 7. Markham Village is looking good as we get ready for spring and a release from the remaining COVID-19 restrictions. I like how Markham Village is a blend of old and new, with enough of the old buildings remaining to remind people of how long the community has been around. Time has been kind to most of the heritage buildings on Main Street, with the majority of them still retaining enough of their original character to show their true age.

**March 9** – A high of 5 degrees, and sunny in the afternoon. I noticed some perennials emerging in the garden on the south side of the house. Today I was taking note of which streets in the village began as farm lanes. As the farms became developed for housing, new public streets following the historic locations of the lanes that led to the farmsteads were created. These are the ones that I know of:

Parkway Avenue follows the lane to the William Robinson Jr. farm. The two-storey brick farmhouse built in 1887 in the Georgian architectural tradition, stills stands at 1 Orchard Street.

Ramona Boulevard follows the lane to the Andrew Robinson farm. The two-storey brick farmhouse in the Georgian architectural tradition, still stands at 14 Ramona Boulevard. It was built *circa* 1855, and is said to have served as the model for the William Robinson Jr. farmhouse.

Station Street follows the lane to the Jacob Reesor farm. The one and a half storey frame farmhouse in the Georgian architectural tradition, built *circa* 1865, still stands at 28 Station Street. A later Reesor family house stands next door.

Springdale Avenue follows the lane to the Jonas Ramer farm. The two-storey brick house, built in the Mennonite Georgian style *circa* 1858, still stands at 30-34 Springdale Avenue. The stucco cladding is a later alteration.

Gleason Street follows the lane to the James Gleason farm. The farmhouse, located to the east of the railway line, was demolished many years ago.

Deer Park Lane follows the lane to the John H. “Deer Park” Ramer farm. The story goes that John Ramer kept some deer in a corral on the property. I wonder how he kept them from jumping over the fence? The Ramer farmhouse, a noteworthy example of Pennsylvania German vernacular architecture, was demolished in 1973 to make way for a townhouse development on the south side of the lane. This old house, built by Peter Ramer in 1837, was taken down before the Province of Ontario enacted legislation to protect significant heritage resources.

It is remarkable that so many of the farmhouses on these former farm lanes still stand on their original sites. The old lanes, now streets, and the farmhouses they served, woven into the fabric of later development, are tangible reminders of the agricultural past of this community.

**March 10** – Another sunny day with a feeling of Spring in the air. I walked up to the Garden Basket Plaza in the afternoon. On the way back, I passed by Deer Park Lane. There is an interpretive plaque near the corner that explains the history of Deer Park Farm and the heritage buildings in the vicinity. There used to be a small, weather-beaten old house on the north-east corner of Deer Park Lane and Main Street North. It seemed out of place among the well-kept residences in the neighbourhood, as if time had stood still on this property while the rest of the area kept on changing through the years. This house, replaced by a new house a number of years ago, dated from *circa* 1840 and had never been modernized. It had been moved to this location about 1900 from its original site, which was in the vicinity of the Markham Museum. From 1941 to 1988, the Housser family lived here. I believe it was in the 1990s when the Housser House was moved for the second time in its history. To save this early building from demolition, it was relocated to the Markham Museum. The exterior was restored but the house was never open to the public. It is an example of plank-on-plank construction. Originally, the exterior had a smooth stucco finish marked off to look like ashlar stonework, a pretty sophisticated treatment for a simple labourer’s cottage.

Regular gasoline rose to \$190.9 per litre at midnight last night. I have noticed that people are not talking about the continuing war in Ukraine. I think it is because the news is so horrific that no one wants to discuss it openly. This is what people mean when they refer to unspeakable things.

**March 11** – Light snow fell last night and continued all day long. Yesterday, much of our lawn was uncovered. Today, all is blanketed with white once again. This is a winter that

just won't quit. On the news they said this is the anniversary date of when the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020.

**March 12** – Back to below-zero temperatures and wintry weather. There has been such a fluctuation in the temperatures from day-to-day. A brisk, biting west wind compelled me to reconsider my plan for a walk in Springdale Park. Instead, in the afternoon, there were errands to run at the bank, post office, and liquor store. I purchased some Kilkenny Irish Cream Ale to enjoy on St. Patrick's Day.

**March 13** – Daylight savings time began today. Although the temperature was a little higher than yesterday, it still felt bitterly cold outside because of the wind. Light snow flurries fell all day but didn't amount to much in the way of accumulation. While I spent much time indoors, I got thinking about how a community of people involved in agriculture is connected to the land until the economy changes and the connection to a place becomes less important. The old homestead gets sold to strangers because none of the children want to remain on the farm. People move away for education and work and other motivations. The old families become dispersed, with few of the early ones remaining local, but plenty of new families moving in as places change from rural to urban. In Markham this change has happened gradually. It wasn't so long ago that Sixteenth Avenue was the point where suburban Markham paused in its growth and rural Markham went on. At this point in time, it seems to me as though the early history of the community is becoming less relevant to the population at large as the recent history of the growing city is about the changing character of the population and the development that supports it. Even traditional suburbia is becoming history before our eyes without having been documented or studied to any great extent. Is anyone photographing neighbourhoods of 1950s bungalows or looking for prime examples of 1960s backsplit and sidesplit modern-era housing before they become drastically altered or disappear altogether?

**March 14** – March Break for the schools. I know several people who have planned vacations away, which adds to the general feeling of life getting back to normal after the lengthy battle with COVID-19. There's a lot less news coverage on this topic now and the daily numbers of cases are not being reported. However, I don't think that the pandemic is officially over. I have gone back to the gym at Centennial Community Centre to re-start my fitness routine. The staff there have said that masking requirements may be lifted soon, but it seems like some people will continue to wear masks in indoor settings like this for a while yet.

In the afternoon, the temperature was a mild 6 degrees. I walked over to Springdale Park and took the Forest Therapy Trail, but travelled the opposite way from the direction I usually go. Doing that, I noticed things from a different perspective. The many days and nights of strong winds this winter have brought down many small trees and branches. The forest floor is thick with deadwood in several places. You can see where city forestry crews have cut up some of the larger trees and placed the pieces on

the forest floor. I thought the water flowing from the spring into the narrow channel through the woodlot was less than usual.

**March 15** – Snow flurries this morning, continuing well into the afternoon, but not really accumulating due to the mild temperature. I observed a black squirrel sitting on a fence, eating a walnut while holding it in its front paws. His (or her) tail was folded back over the top of the body to provide shelter from the wet snow that was falling.

In the *Farmer's Almanac*, beside this date is noted the phrase “Beware the ides of March,” from Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. I well recall taking up this play in Grade 9 English Class, and the warning that was given to Caesar, which he disregarded at his peril. Even after all these years, every March 15<sup>th</sup> I think about “Beware the ides of March.” The *Pocket Oxford Dictionary* tells me that the ides are the 15<sup>th</sup> of March, May, July and October, and the 13<sup>th</sup> of all the other months, from the old Roman calendar. The definition does not go as far as giving the meaning of “ides.” I find it interesting how elements of ancient cultures and traditions persist in humanity’s collective memory, even though the meaning of these things has long been forgotten or has become an obscure bit of trivia. When I looked a little further into the “ides” I learned that they mark the approximate middle of each month and were said to have been coincident with the full moon.<sup>15</sup>

**March 16** – This has been the busiest day at the bird feeder in a while. I observed a male cardinal, a couple of nuthatches, and a purple finch. A female American goldfinch was the most frequently-seen visitor on previous days. In the afternoon, after the temperature had warmed up a bit, I walked down Main Street to the Church Street Parkette, then went on toward George Street. At 11 Church Street there is a white stucco building that houses the Markham Guild of Village Crafts, an organization established in 1971. The Guild offers classes in a number of traditional arts and crafts. Quilting, needlework, beadwork, and stained glass are some of the classes included in a list posted near the front door. There is a write-up of the history of the building and the Markham Guild of Village Crafts posted there as well, which has an archival photograph of how the property looked in the early twentieth century. The building looks something like a church because that is what it started out as. Originally, this was Holiness Pentecostal Church, constructed in 1910. From 1959 to 1990, another church group, the Markham Gospel Church, worshipped here. They placed the old building on a new foundation that provided a basement, and made additions to the front and rear. The Guild has been located here since 1991. I have wondered, based on the style of windows and the overall simple design of the original building, if this was a nineteenth century structure moved to this site in 1910 rather than a completely new building erected at that time.

**March 17** – St. Patrick’s Day. Irish stew is on the menu for tonight’s dinner, with sourdough bread and real butter. We make our Irish stew with beef rather than lamb or

mutton, so it is not truly authentic. To make up for that, a goodly amount of Guinness stout goes into the recipe.

Out in the workshop this afternoon, tidying up items that were put away at the end of fall last year. In a month, the peony supports can be removed from storage and placed where they need to go. I've already seen some peonies tentatively coming up in the south garden bed. A couple of robins were hanging around the area in front of the workshop, foraging for food. It was warm enough (16 or 17 degrees) that I soon shed my jacket. This was the warmest day so far this year, made all the better with the sun shining and only a hint of breeze. The snow cover has gone except in shady areas, or where the snow was piled high when the driveway was cleared. Everything looked good in the workshop. No animals seem to have made their way in as far as I could tell. I'm looking forward to working on some projects this spring. In the good weather, I find that I go into the workshop at least once a day for some reason or another. It's my way of transporting myself to another time. Looking out the windows, with their wavy glass at least 158 years old, adds to this effect. The windows come from a house in Scarborough built by Nathaniel Hastings, farmer and joiner, built in 1864.

**March 18** – Took a late afternoon walk with my wife Linda, at first travelling through the Raymerville neighbourhood immediately to the west of where we live. This neighbourhood is a textbook example of 1980s suburban community planning, with its complex network of streets, all curve-shaped and with courts and crescents. Different streets have different classes of houses on them. The smaller houses, on narrow lot frontages, are found on the busier main roads like Snider Drive. The 1980s was the age of the so-called “snout house,” a type of detached home where the street front is dominated by a projecting garage. This design, while not particularly attractive, was an efficient use of land, allowing for narrower lots because the garages and driveways were placed in front of instead of behind or beside the residence. It is interesting to see that there is no sign of demolition and rebuilding of individual houses in this neighbourhood, perhaps an indication that the properties are already as intensely developed as they can be. This is different from the Robinson neighbourhood with its 1950s bungalows on larger lots, where rebuilding has become a constant process.

We continued on to Tannery Pond Park and took the boardwalk down to Robinson Street. Robinson Creek was fast-flowing, with a higher than usual volume of water. While on the boardwalk we heard the calls of redwing blackbirds, the first I have heard this year. At home, our local family of chipmunks just made their presence known.

**March 19** – The last day of winter. Rain overnight, then rain off and on throughout the day. Not a great day for being outside, but a good day to sleep in and later, do some reading of a mystery novel. The rain has dissolved much of the remaining snow cover, so very little now remains. When I travelled through the commercial heart of Markham Village in the early afternoon, it was wet and raw and there were few people to be seen out on the street.

**March 20 – The Vernal Equinox.** The first day of spring has arrived. It was sunny in the afternoon but there was a cool, blustery north-west wind as a reminder that we are still in the month of March. I chose to create my last entry in my journal while sitting by the front window of the Second Cup coffee shop at 68 Main Street, sipping on a hot chocolate while I watched people and traffic pass by. There was a steady stream of customers coming in and out of the coffee shop, mostly to pick up “to go” beverages and then be on their way. The weather brought out a noticeable cheerfulness in both the servers and their customers. There was a lot of conversation. It was refreshing to be in the midst of all of this positive energy. A lot has happened over the year since I started writing *A Year in Old Markham Village*, but the village has stayed pretty constant. I feel fortunate to be able to live as a villager in the midst of the every-growing, ever-changing City of Markham. Most villages are separated from other settlements by extensive agricultural lands or natural areas. Not so for Markham Village. This is a village embedded within the continuous suburban development that has grown up around it and filled in much of the open space that once existed between the various historic communities of Markham. Markham Village has retained its identity while adapting to the changes brought about by the Modern Era. While the days are long gone when the village was small enough that everyone knew everyone, and many of your neighbours were also your relatives, this remains a friendly community of neighbourly neighbours. Every time I walk along my street, and especially when I am returning home, I feel thankful that I get to live here with my family, in a unique old house in a community with its own distinctive personality. It’s a good place to be.

## Sources

Much of the information on historical buildings and sites in and around Markham Village comes from the *Register of Property of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest* on the City of Markham’s website and from my own general knowledge of Markham’s history. In cases where historic properties are individually designated under the *Ontario Heritage Act*, the *Register* contains more detailed information. Historical information was also found on interpretive plaques in the village. In some cases, research was carried out by the writer, using land records, census data, directories and old maps. The following references relate to direct quotes or information found in secondary sources:

### Introduction and Spring 2021

1. Mitchell & Co.’s *General Directory for the City of Toronto and Gazetteer of the Counties of York and Peel for 1866*. Toronto: Mitchell & Co. Publishers, 1866, page 406.
2. Wigmore, Donna. *Historic Peter Street*. The Historic Peter Street Bicentennial Committee, 1994.

3. Brydon, Catherine. *Markham 1900 – 2000, Our Past Inspires Our Future*. Markham: Markham Historical Society, 2017, page 117; and *Markham*. A typewritten history of Markham Village dated 1967, no author name, from the files of the City of Markham Heritage Section of Planning and Urban Design, pages 5 and 6.
4. Dixon, Fred. *Fun Was Where We Made It, Mount Joy 1900 – 1915*. Markham: Fred Dixon, 1971, pages 31 and 32.
5. The story of the Stonehouse Robbery is told on an interpretive plaque erected by the municipality near the south-east corner of Highway 7 and Main Street, opposite the site of the events of 1936.
6. *Mitchell & Co.'s General Directory for the City of Toronto and Gazetteer of the Counties of York and Peel for 1866*, page 406.
7. "Another Landmark Gone (Obituary of Sinclair Holden)." *The Markham Economist*, December 9, 1886, page 91.
8. Biographical Information on Blodwen Davies from the on-line Canadian Encyclopedia. Article by Rodger J. Moran, January 17, 2012.
9. Davies, Blodwen. *A String of Amber, The Story of the Mennonites in Canada*. Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1973, pages 153 and 164.
10. Information on the industries centred around Tannery Pond Park is found on two interpretive plaques north of Robinson Street, erected by the municipality.
11. *History of Toronto and County of York*. Volume II, Biographical Notices. Toronto: C. Blackett Robinson, Publisher, 1885, pages 285-325.
12. Minhinnick, Jeanne. *At Home in Upper Canada*. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, 1983, page 16.
13. Reminiscences of David Burkholder. *The Stouffville Tribune*, September 13, 1931, page 8.
14. Champion, Isobel, ed. *Markham 1793-1900*. Second Edition, Revised. Markham: Markham Historical Society, 1989, page 248.
15. *Mitchell & Co.'s General Directory of Toronto and Gazetteer for the Counties of York and Peel for 1866*, page 406.
16. *Markham 1793-1900*, page 248.
17. *Markham 1793-1900*, page 336.
18. *Markham 1793-1900*, page 52.
19. Bonis, Robert R. *A History of Scarborough*. Scarborough: Scarborough Public Library, 1965, pages 70, 71 and 85.
20. Reaman, G. Elmore. *The Trail of the Black Walnut*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Limited, 1957, noted in *Markham 1793-1900*, page 28.
21. Symons, Harry. *Fences*. Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1958, page 87.
22. Walton, George. *City of Toronto Directory for 1837*. Toronto, U. C. Printed by T. Dalton and W. J. Coates, 1837. Includes York County
23. "Memories of Markham Village as it was Fifty to Seventy Years Ago." Anthony Forster. *The Markham Economist & Sun*, June 28, 1923.
24. *Markham 1793-1900*, pages 254 and 255.
25. *Markham 1793-1900*, page 14.
26. *At Home in Upper Canada*, page 5.
27. *At Home in Upper Canada*, page 26.
28. *Markham 1793-1900*, page 75.
29. Interpretive plaque giving the history of Morgan Park, erected by the municipality in Morgan Park, east side of George Street; and *Markham 1793-1900*, page 36.



## Summer 2021

1. The history of Captain Armstrong and Ash Grove Farm is found in *Markham 1793-1900*, pages 58, 60 and 106.
2. *Markham 1793-1900*, page 181.
3. *Markham 1793-1900*, page 274.
4. *History of Toronto and County of York*, Volume II, pages 323 and 324.
5. Google search: David Tsubouchi.
6. *Markham 1793-1900*, page 260.
7. *Historic Peter Street* building histories.
8. *Markham 1900-2000 – Our Past Inspires Our Future*, page 118.
9. George Walton's *City of Toronto for 1837*. Includes York County.
10. *Markham 1793-1900*, page 133.
11. Robinson Farm interpretive plaque erected by the municipality on Parkway Avenue frontage of Morgan Park; also, a history of Markham Dairy by Carman Lewis in the Collection of the Markham Museum.
12. *Markham 1793-1900*, page 251.
13. *Markham 1793-1900*, pages 77 and 78.
14. Franklin Street Public School interpretive plaque erected by the municipality on
15. A photographic detail of the ornate woodwork of the Wedding Cake House is found in Rempel, John I. *Building with Wood and other aspects of nineteenth-century building in central Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Revised edition 1980, page 349.

## Fall 2021

1. *Markham 1793-1900*, page 249.
2. *Markham Economist & Sun*, June 17, 1915.
3. Champion, Mary B. *Markham Remembered, A Photographic History of Old Markham Township*. Markham: Markham Historical Society, 1988, pages 172 and 196.
4. Tim Clark's Flowers website.
5. *Markham Remembered*, page 182.
6. *Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada, 1800-1950*. "Arthur Richard Denison," [dictionaryofarchitectsincanada.org](http://dictionaryofarchitectsincanada.org).
7. *Markham Remembered, A Photographic History of Old Markham Township*. Pages 191-193, 240-241.
8. "The Joys of the Road." Bliss Carman and Richard Hovey. *Songs from Vagabondia*. Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1894, pages 5-8.
9. *Mitchell & Co.'s General Directory for the City of Toronto and Gazetteer for the Counties of York and Peel for 1866*. Page 407.
10. Google search: "John and Marion Alfsen."
11. *Markham 1900-2000, Our Past Inspires Our Future*. Page 114.
12. Google search: "Canadian Thanksgiving."
13. Google search: "Vinegar Hill."
14. "Memories of Markham Village as it was Fifty to Seventy Years Ago," Anthony Forster.
15. *Markham 1793-1900*, page 270.

16. Google Search: "Conkers."
17. *Markham Remembered*, page 196.
18. *The Trail of the Black Walnut*, page 18.
19. *Mitchell & Co.'s General Directory for the City of Toronto and Gazetteer for the Counties of York and Peel for 1866*, page 407.
20. *Markham 1900-2000, Our Past Inspires Our Future*, page 143.
21. An Archival photograph of the William Speight house is found on page 73 of *Markham Remembered*.
22. Google Search: "Pippins."
23. *The Old House Journal* is still published as a full colour magazine.
24. Barker Family File, Heritage Section, City of Markham Planning and Urban Design, marker at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Cemetery.
25. List of Markham Village Post Masters in *Markham 1793-1900*, page 335.
26. "Memories of Markham Village as it was Fifty to Seventy Years Ago," Anthony Forster.
27. *Markham 1793-1900*, page 265.

#### Winter 2021-2022

1. *Markham 1793-1900*, pages 77 and 78.
2. *Markham 1900-2000, Our Past Inspires Our Future*, page 199.
3. Bezener, Andy. *Birds of Ontario* (Revised Edition). Edmonton: Lone Pine Publishing and Partners Publishing, 2016, page 256.
4. *The Trail of the Black Walnut*, pages 181-185.
5. Google Search: "Wolf Moon"
6. *Markham Remembered*, page 188.
7. Sherck, Michael Gonder. *Pen Pictures of Early Pioneer Life in Upper Canada*. Toronto: William Briggs, 1905, page 254.
8. *Markham 1793-1900*, pages 72 and 73.
9. FitzGerald, Doris M. *Thornhill – An Ontario Village*. Thornhill: D. M. FitzGerald, 1964, pages 15 and 16, and FitzGerald, Doris M. *Old Time Thornhill*. Thornhill: D. M. FitzGerald, 1970, page 11.
10. Google Search: "360 Kids."
11. *Markham 1793-1900*, pages 189 and 190.
12. *Markham Remembered*, page 201.
13. *Markham 1793-1900*, pages 195, 261, 262 and 265.
14. *Markham Remembered*, page 178.
15. Google Search: "Ides."

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the local people who were kind enough to share their stories of old Markham Village with me and thereby enrich this chronical of life in our community. I would also like to express my appreciation to Dianne More,

Linaire Armstrong and Kasey Bayne for reviewing the text and finding those pesky typographical errors that I missed seeing and correcting.

George Duncan, September 2022



