

# Mount Dennis A Brief History

Presentation to Urban Land Institute Community Imagineering Program

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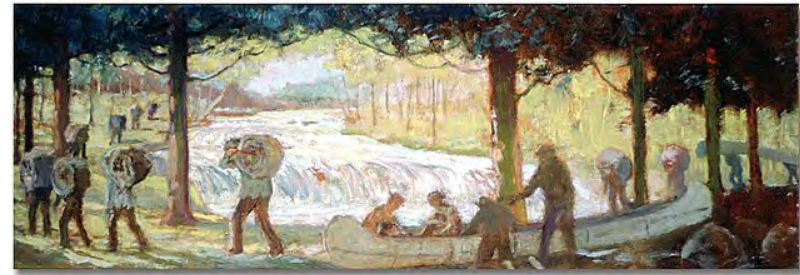
Mount Dennis Community Association

# Beginnings



- 1000-400 BC: arrowheads show hunting in Eglinton Flats

- Pre-19<sup>th</sup> Century: The Carrying Place Trail



- Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Land Grants, Mills and a Cemetery





# Middle & Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century

- Middle: Forests & farms; Sawmills

Weston Plank Road (1844-6)

John Brown Pottery on Black Creek

Grand Trunk Railway (1856)

Retired seaman Joseph Dennis lives many years in retirement on his Buttonwood estate where he mainly enjoys fishing until his death in 1867

- Late: “a rolling countryside of farm lands still well wooded.”  
Then brickworks, individual home-building, and at last ... .

# 1890s – Mount Dennis Takes Off!

- Streets start to appear on the map. By 1892 it shows 5 streets in addition to Weston and Eglinton (itself mostly a cart track).
- The streetcar line from St.Clair via (Old) Weston Road up to Weston Village opens in 1894. It is single track with a few passing places, but it immediately boosts Mount Dennis' population
- A school is built
- A post office is opened
- There is even a station stop on the railway (but no platform!)

# AFTER 1900 the growth just keeps going!

- Dennis Ave. School needs new rooms every few years, and in 1913 a second school, Bala, opens with 10 rooms
- There are no doctors, but Nurse Lowe delivers babies, nurses the sick, and attends to the injured
- By 1904 the **Toronto Free Hospital for the Consumptive Poor** is built; the City donates surplus former horse-drawn streetcars to provide more ward space!
- 1910 ... A wonderful photo in the Library shows local children swimming in the “Swimming Hole on Black Creek”
- In 1911 a Methodist church is already operating, and the Anglicans start to meet in a nearby home while the congregation’s menfolk build the basement for their future church
- 1912: Kodak buys 25 acres of farmland north of Eglinton
- 1913: First Annual Old-Country Fair held across from Good Shepherd Church

# World War I

- Kodak's new building is taken over as temporary barracks for military training
- Most Mount Dennis residents originate from Britain, and our area has among Ontario's highest per capita armed forces recruitment
- Mount Dennis continues to grow, adding more stores and a theatre (which promptly gets taken over for day-time school classes!)
- A fire brigade is formed (with just one reel)
- 1916: Kodak starts operating from its new site
- 1918-19: Mount Dennis is severely hit by a Spanish Flu epidemic, just as it gets its first doctor

# The early 1920s

- This decade brings lots more expansion, with many new homes targeted at Kodak workers
- Many more factories are built. There are more brickyards, a local coal depot, a wood yard, and a fire hall
- 1923 sees **the great incorporation debate**, as Mount Dennis comes close to becoming an independent municipality. But the vote is 689 against leaving York Township vs. 500 in favour.
- A sewage plant is built near Black Creek. Toilets are added to Dennis School. A Boys Brigade is created and new churches built.



# The late 1920s

- Businessman Trethewey buys a large area of farmland, builds a private road across it, donates this and a park, creates industrial lots north of Kodak (now the Black Creek Business District)
- Legion Branch and Roselands Horticultural Society both created
- New schools, sewers and paved roads built, and a library opens
- Good Shepherd enlarged, Mount Dennis Theatre opens
- Ray Ave. railway underpasses built to access new industrial sites
- Eleven new industries open in 1929, including Facelle (now Irving)
- York Memorial Collegiate built just east of Mount Dennis

# Depression of the 1930s

- Mount Dennis and the rest of York Township hit extremely hard
- Emergency Relief Committee formed. Municipal staff take 5% voluntary cut. York Township has 4,000 unemployed families
- Township, near bankrupt in 1933, placed under Provincial supervision
- THFTCP, with 650 T.B. patients, is one of Canada's largest sanitariums
- York Township's rate of "families on relief" far the highest in GTA
- Properties abandoned by families unable to pay taxes
- Fish & Chip store built on Golden Crisp site
- 1936 brings worst heat wave on record

# World War 2 brings relief

- Army offers work, and war-time industries revitalize Mount Dennis
- York Township leaves Provincial Supervision in 1941
- This area votes CCF in 1942
- In 1944 several new parks are built, and Eglinton Ave. is paved
- In 1945 York plans a new municipal building, starts work on street lighting, creates a parks and recreation program
- In 1946 the Mount Dennis Athletic Assoc. had 13 softball teams
- In 1948 trolley-buses replaced the Weston streetcars, a proper bridge over Black Creek is built on Jane St., & Good Shepherd builds tower

# Prosperity in the 1950s

- 1950 - York Civic Centre opens & Mount Dennis gets a new library
- 1952 - Beech-Hall housing complex opens; Legion plans a new hall
- 1953 Metro Toronto created with big budget for new infrastructure; Jane Street becomes a through road via swampy Flats
- Oct. 1954: Hurricane Hazel devastates the Humber Valley
- Conservation Authority created to control floods; farming in the Flats replaced by new parks (over ten years); Betty's Jam closes
- Steadily increasing prosperity benefits Mount Dennis

# Heyday of the late 50s & 1960s

- Eglinton rebuilt (to be future Richview expressway)
- Major cloverleaf planned for Black Creek & Jane
- Mount Dennis has several gas stations and rising car ownership
- Most local industries are flourishing
- Churches and youth groups are packed
- Urban growth starts to make Mount Dennis part of Toronto

# 70s & 80s bring apartments & decline

- Four big apartment buildings on Emmett by the NW Flats (1969-79)
- More on Oxford and Denarda (THC), 2 on Eglinton (early-mid 80s)
- Black Creek Drive ('82) takes traffic off Weston Road
- But industrial jobs are starting to decline
- Mount Dennis is a working class area with no subway access
- York, the poorest part of Metro, has older roads, infrastructure
- Cheaper rents attract new immigrants; some struggle to survive
- Kodak's shorter lunch hour hurts local retail trade
- But West Park gets new main building

# 1990s - dashed hopes for a needy area

- New subway approved by Rae, then cancelled by Harris
- Plans for City Centre development cancelled
- Redevelopment of Levy Scrapyard lands begins with seniors building
- Toronto's amalgamation creates uncertainty
- Mount Dennis increasingly seen as an immigration reception area
- Traditional churches see declining membership

# 2000s – Struggles and Hopes

- Mount Dennis declared a “Priority Neighbourhood”
- West Humber & Portage Trail schools built; West Park opens long-term care home
- MDCA is revitalized; Action for Neighbourhood Change formed
- Some older residents resent diversity / newcomers struggle get established
- Kodak closes (2005) and sells “Kodak Heights”, but
- No Frills opens, City builds new bus garage, Canada Post creates Ray Ave. depot
- Weston Rd. townhouses; new OLV school; Library rebuilt but MDUC closes (2012)
- *Toronto Life* ranks Mount Dennis LAST in 2012 Neighbourhoods issue
- UPX built; Mount Dennis chosen as LRT Terminus & Rail Yard
- Mount Dennis Station offers hope for a better future!