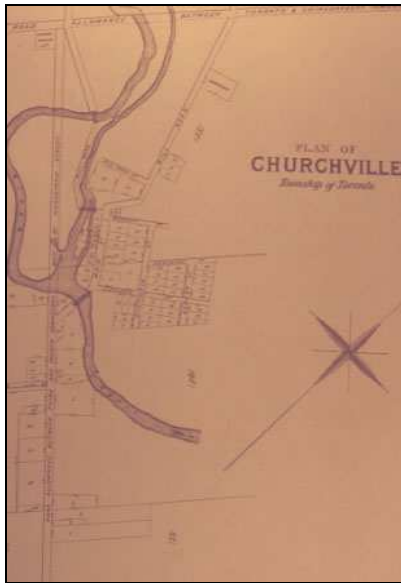
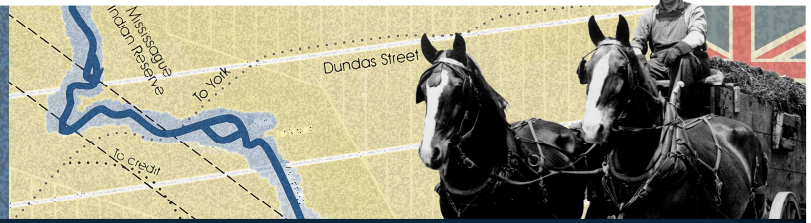


Stories From Our Past

A Brief History of Mississauga's "Lost" Town

by Richard Collins



Churchville, 1877

About 30 years ago, Mississauga lost one of its founding communities. Churchville is still there, just where the settlers settled it nearly 200 years ago. About 75 families still call it home. But Churchville is no longer a part of Mississauga.

It's been recorded that Churchville was named after a loyalist, Amazia Church, who may have come from either Massachusetts or Virginia. The first survey maps from 1821 don't show any property occupied, or owned in absentia, by anyone named Church.

Amazia's name shows up years later, as a member of the Quarter Sessions and as a farmer in the area, but the date of his arrival remains a mystery. He may have settled in the area as early as 1815, before the British purchased the land from the Mississauga nation. That means Church was a 'squatter' – a person without official title to the land, but later claiming residency by virtue of having built a home on property that no one else was already living on. The sudden disappearance of his name on later land records suggests that he was removed after his land was legally granted to someone else.

Jacob Brill was the first man to arrive in Churchville with a land deed in hand, in July 1821. Church built the first gristmill about the same time. His flour mill was the second busiest mill in town – a distant second in production to the town's rumour mill. Tall tales, rabid rumours, half-truths and just plain, good stories abounded in Churchville.

One 'account' claims that the rebel William Lyon Mackenzie not only hid in Churchville during his escape from the law in 1837, but that he may have taken some time from his hasty retreat to make a rousing speech – railing against the Queen, the army that was chasing him, and anything else British. One wonders why a man with a £1,000 bounty on his head would want to draw such a crowd.

Mackenzie really did campaign in Churchville two years before the rebellion, while running for re-election to the Upper Canada parliament for the 2nd Riding of York. Storytellers from succeeding generations likely combined the campaign and escape stories into one more-colourful tale.

Another take on the story has both Mackenzie and co-conspirator, Sam Lount, calling on Churchville's residents to rebel. This story may be true. Churchville resident, James Pearson, did marry Lount's sister, Jane.

Another tale tells of a visit to town, in 1836, by the founder of the Mormon church. It's not known whether "The Prophet", Joseph Smith ever proselytised here but a few years later about a dozen of Churchville's families did follow his successor, the Toronto-born John Taylor, to Utah.

For 150 years, the villagers of Churchville paid their land taxes to the Township of Toronto – the same township that now makes up most of modern-day Mississauga. Everything south of Steeles Avenue was Toronto Township until 1974. That year regional government came to Peel County and, being politicians, the councillors decided to leave their mark by redrawing Peel's borders. A new boundary separating Mississauga and Brampton was drawn south of Steeles, placing Toronto Township's former village of Churchville in Brampton.