

COVID-19 RECALLS CHEDOKE'S LEGACY

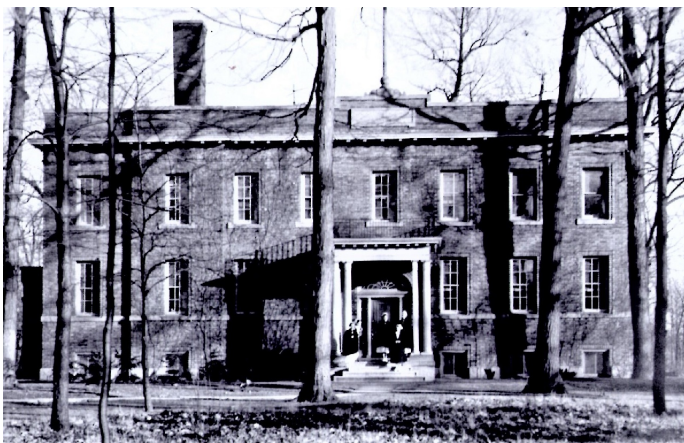
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By Robert J. Williamson

HAMILTON MOUNTAIN IS NO STRANGER TO COMBATING DISEASE. A sixty hectare site on the west Hamilton Mountain that would become known as the "Big Healing Place" began in 1904 as two tents in a farmer's orchard. It became the Mountain Tuberculosis Sanatorium, the largest institution of its kind in Canada or, for that matter, the British Empire. Here in Hamilton, the campaign to arrest this insidious and deadly disease was the most advanced and progressive in the nation. Every few years we are reminded of how tentative public health issues can be with deadly outbreaks of Ebola virus, SARS and now COVID-19. Despite these warnings, Tuberculosis (TB) is making a comeback while sanatoriums around the country are disappearing.

It is for this reason in 2003, as Vice-President of the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society, when invited to edit a centennial history of the San entitled "CHEDOKE, More Than A Sanatorium", I volunteered my services. However, it was on condition that in addition to the book, a City of Hamilton Commemorative plaque be installed to preserve the important heritage of this once outstanding facility.

Time waits for no man and nothing in today's world is permanent. A large part of Chedoke, once known as the "Orchard", filled with massive hospital pavilions designed to provide rest and rehabilitation for women, men, children and Inuit TB patients, will soon disappear. The site will become a different kind of community filled with luxury "Bungaloffs" and executive Townhouses. The Brow Infirmary built by the federal government to help WWI soldiers recover from TB is nothing more than piles of rubble now. Only the nearby Long and Bisby Building, remains on the brow lands today. It was named in honor of the wealthy wool merchants who donated the \$85,000.00 for the construction of the former nurse's residence in 1920, It housed a Cool School" from 1973-1983 providing education for troubled students after which it became a Day Care for the Chedoke community.



Long & Bisby Building Nurses Residence 1920

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Slated to become a luxury home site, the builder has promised to delay demolition of the Long and Bisby Building until a heritage assessment can be done. However, from experience we should know that old buildings are very expensive retrofits. Requirements to meet modern day electrical, heating, plumbing and structural codes not to mention fire safety and asbestos regulations are very difficult to accommodate.

A recent illegal video released on the internet by trespassers shows that the once substantial hospital building, one of the last of a glorious medical heritage reminding us of Hamilton's "Big Healing Place" is well on its way to demolition by neglect.

On the other hand we can take satisfaction from the fact that based on a 2006 Hamilton Health Science's Development Plan, almost half of the former Chedoke property has been designated to facilitate innovative educational programs, research, care and accommodation for the elderly as well as community recreational services. Adapting to the community's needs from the very beginning has been the Chedoke Legacy.



St. Peter's Residence for long-term care sits on former sanatorium land donated by Chedoke Health Corporation.

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Come what may, at least we know that the history of this once magnificent Hamilton medical facility has been preserved in a 284 page picture history coffee table book as well as a City of Hamilton Commemorative plaque.

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