

## THE BECKETT DRIVE STORY

The Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society regularly reports on the location and history of original Mountain homesteads. Thanks to Glen Nott, a west mountain resident, our attention has been drawn to a distinctive 2 ½ storey farm house in the Buchanan neighborhood that belonged to the Beckett family.

The Wentworth County 1875 Atlas shows the house as part of a 100 acre farm on the east side of Garth Street midway between Fennell Avenue and Sanatorium Road. It sits on the southern boundary of Hillfield Strathallan College. From the present school boundary, it extended south along Garth Street to Sanatorium Road and east to the former junction with Mohawk Road. The northeastern corner of the farm straddled present day Buchanan Park Elementary School site.

The Beckett homestead shown here was probably built in 1874. It is remarkably similar in appearance and age to the nearby Binkley house recently renovated as part of St. Martin's Manor at 500 Mohawk Road West.



Photo & statistics courtesy HPL History / Archives section.

The Beckett family story began two hundred years ago and can be traced in church records, census reports, City Directories and finally Saint Peters Cemetery head stones on Mohawk Road West. Henry Beckett (1802-1884) and his wife Anne Garner (1806-1894) were born in Cheshire, England. His profession was recorded as an engineer. They were married in Manchester on March 8, 1830. The first of four sons was Fredrick Garner 1832-1889, followed by Henry Jr. 1833-1914, Charles 1834-1874 and Samuel Allan 1847-?.

For reasons that can only be imagined, the family immigrated to Canada in 1855 perhaps to provide their four sons with more opportunities. They arrived in Hamilton at the height of the rapidly expanding railway era. The 1871 Census shows Henry Beckett with three of his sons: Fredrick G, Henry Jr. and Samuel operating the Beckett F.G. & Co. Manufacturers of locomotive and marine steam engines and boilers at 250 McNab Street North. Henry Sr. at age 69 chose to become a gentleman

Mountain farmer and purchased the previously described farm listed in the 1875 Wentworth County Atlas.

He died on the farm at age 81, possibly of tuberculosis and was buried in the nearby Saint Peters cemetery on Mohawk Road West. His widow, Anne lived another ten years in the big house along with her second son Henry Beckett Junior and his family.

It was in the 1890s that her grandson, Fredrick Henry Beckett, made the family name memorable. With automobiles and incline railways coming into fashion, this third generation visionary, descendent of an engineering family, dreamed of linking existing mountain access roads, beginning with Garth Street, to create a scenic escarpment drive. It was planned to connect Garth Street in the west to Flock Road (now Kenilworth Access) in the east. The most difficult part of the construction was to link Garth Street to Queen Street and back up to West 5<sup>th</sup>. That is why the Queen Street Access is called Beckett Drive today. Connecting Claremont Drive to the James Street Hill, Strongman's Road and Jolley Cut was relatively easy but the trail never went beyond Sam Lawrence Park on Concession Street. Parts of the route exists today as the Bruce Trail.

All that is left of the 100 acre Beckett farm today is the house. It sits anonymously in a neighborhood named for another well known contemporary railway era Mountain resident of Auchmar estate, Isaac Buchanan. The Beckett farm began to disappear c. 1960 when Economy Home Builders Limited began construction of "fashion designed homes of distinction" attracting home buyers to the West Mountain. Called Beckett Orchards, it was made accessible to Queen Street below the escarpment by Beckett Drive. The link to West 5<sup>th</sup> is now a walking trail.

# 84 Mountain Memories by award winning writer Robert Williamson appears monthly for the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society. See <Hamiltonheritage.ca> for meeting information

