

MOUNTAIN HISTORY IN RETROSPECT

By Robert Williamson

During the preceding eight months of 2017, I have been following a theme of Canadian Confederation as it relates to our Mountain Memories. A story in the August 17, 2017 Mountain News about an impending increase in water rates caught my eye and in retrospect suggested a Hamilton Mountain connection to the decade leading up to Confederation in 1867.

Hamilton's first waterworks system, consisting of a giant pumping station (now a museum), pumped water from Lake Ontario to a reservoir on the mountainside at the head of Ottawa Street. The project was completed in 1859 and officially inaugurated by H.R.H. Edward Prince of Wales in 1860. The water system was considered the crowning achievement of the era and cost the city a whopping \$900,000.00. This did not include the costs of beautifying Gore Park and the installation of two fountains which were partially funded by the generosity of leading citizens such as mountain resident Isaac Buchanan of Auchmar.

However, the waterworks was not the only example of civic extravagance in 1860, which was irrevocably reducing the once solvent city to bankruptcy. Through the efforts of Sir Allan MacNab and again, the Honorable Isaac Buchanan of Auchmar, the city lobbied to secure the site of the Province's 1860 Agricultural Exhibition. It was considered a business coup for Hamilton, but it came at the cost of spending a large sum of money for a fairground (Victoria Park) and a large ornate exhibition hall (Crystal Palace).

At this same time, Hamilton was trying to maintain its position as a provincial railway centre. In this determination the city pledged \$900,000.00 in debentures, much of it to pay for the Hamilton and Port Dover Railway, which was under construction up the Red Hill Valley escarpment to Mount Albion.

The city also needed mountain access roads during this period but could not afford to build them. Fortunately, private citizens like John W. Kerr (1860), Daniel Flock (1865) and James Jolley (1870), living on the edge of the escarpment, built their own access roads.

Now 150 years later, one cannot help drawing a comparison of city finances, then and now. Water rates are exploding to pay for the replacement of the old water system, once considered a crowning achievement. The Crystal Palace can be compared to the costly Tim Hortons Field, and the railway fever of the 1860s can be compared to the LRT bandwagon craze of today. One thing is certain, there will be no private citizens coming forward to rescue the city from its mountain access repair dilemma.



The East End Reservoir centered in this 1899 westward view was built in 1859 for Hamilton's first municipal water system. The empty basin is totally overgrown now. Kerr & (obscured) Flock access roads angle down from the top left, crossing the prominent Hamilton/Port Dover track bed, which is a walking trail today.

Courtesy HPLSC.

Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society's "Mountain Memories" by Robert Williamson appears monthly in the Mountain News..