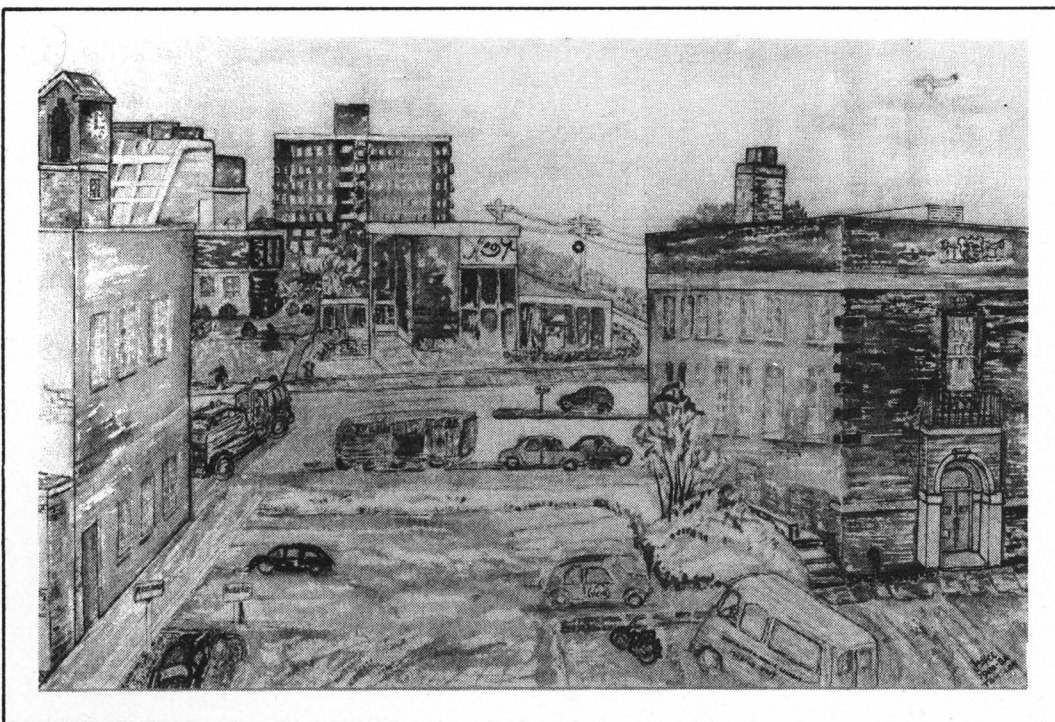


"Their Memories"



A sketch of Empress Avenue and Yonge Street, North York, showing the old Central Library, with the original City Hall in the right foreground.

By Jean Jansley

THEIR MEMORIES

A collaborative project
of the

North York Public Library

and the

North York Seniors Centre

in celebration of the opening of the
North York Central Library
5120 Yonge Street
North York, Ontario
M2N 5N7

June 4, 1987

Compiled by members of the North York Seniors
Centre

Margo Christo and Laurence Clarke

Cover illustration
Jean Tansley

Printed by:



North York Public Library



Sheppard Avenue
Looking east at Lansing

"THEIR MEMORIES" was developed co-operatively by the North York Public Library and the North York Seniors Centre to commemorate the opening of North York's new Central Library. The Seniors Centre felt it would be particularly appropriate to record their memories of North York because they have seen the area change from a string of rural hamlets and develop and grow into Canada's fifth largest city. Many of the memories recorded in this booklet are also on video tape, available on request in the Canadiana Collection at the North York Central Library.

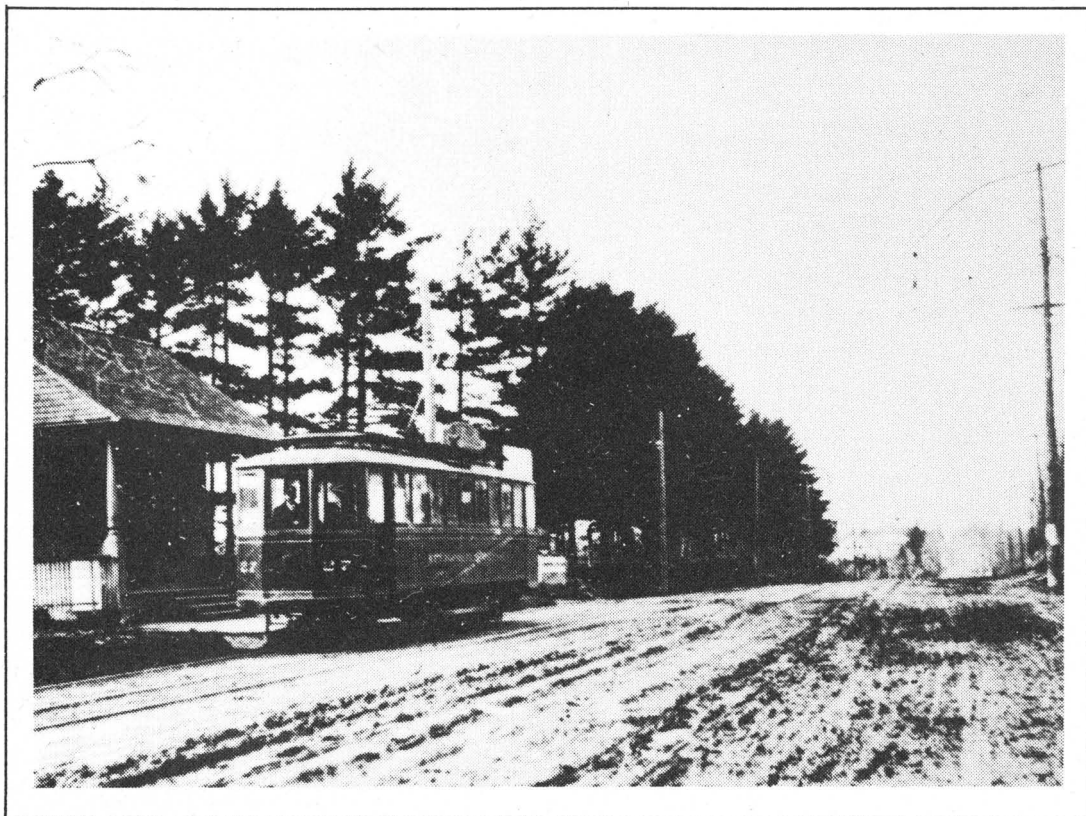
Participants in the program all remember daily routines that modern day residents would find unimaginable. In many homes, there was no running water or electricity. In the winter, the streets were impassable and in the spring, they turned into quagmires of mud. There were no hospitals and few doctors but there was a neighbourliness that maintained spirits, solved problems, and brought the community together.

Neighbours used neighbours' water pumps and telephones: they gathered to listen to one another's radios, especially the Saturday night hockey games from Maple Leaf Gardens. Many owned cows and chickens for milk and eggs and maintained vegetable gardens. The radial cars which ran up and down Yonge Street were an essential means of transportation.

The reminiscences in **"THEIR MEMORIES"** are a touching reminder of years gone by. They are also a measure of how quickly and dramatically North York has changed during the years these people remember so well.

A special thanks to Jean Tansley for the illustration on the cover and to Margo Christo and Laurence Clarke for compiling this booklet of memories. The photographs are provided through the courtesy of the North York Historical Society and Mr. Clarke's personal collection.

North York Public Library
May 1987



Yonge Street at Glengrove Avenue
Toronto, Ontario
(looking north)

I remember North York in the 20's when it was divided into little communities. Each community was about three blocks square. Yonge and Sheppard was known as Lansing. Yonge and Finch was Finch's Corners, Yonge and Cummer was Newtonbrook and Yonge and Steeles as Steeles Corners.

The radial car started at the city limits on Yonge Street and ran all the way up to Lake Wilcox. Some cars went as far as Lake Simcoe. For a short time, a branch line went to Kleinburg, but that was discontinued in 1928. The fare was five cents for every 1 1/2 miles.

Radial streetcar riders would often be met by relatives and friends at the car stops. They would arrive by horse and wagon to pick up their passengers. Dempsey's stayed open on Saturday nights until 12:15 to serve the last passengers of the radial car and those who went to meet them.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bill Melhuish', with a stylized, cursive script.

Bill Melhuish



Bread Wagon on Melrose Avenue
Willowdale, Ontario
1947

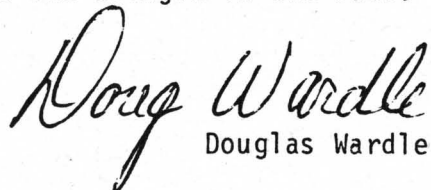
I was born at 226 Connaught Avenue, Newtonbrook in 1923. Most of my memories are of the 30's.

One of my favourites is the door-to-door salesmen. Some sold needles and thread, some bought gold (as in false teeth). There was a traveling barber named Farnham, who cut your hair on a kitchen chair. There was a horse-drawn bakery wagon. A man named Eaton came with a horse and wagon to sell fruit and vegetables, and, of course, there were milk and bread men. There also were rag and bone men who came by horse and wagon who would pay for junk. The children in those days made a few pennies by selling to them.

Most businesses delivered at that time. Stevenson's General Store delivered by horse and wagon. You could use a neighbour's phone to call in an order or the delivery man would pick up your order list when he was in the area. The store would keep a running bill for you. Lee Chung, a Chinese laundry man, also delivered. His store was next to the Hydro building. He was there even before the Hydro building was built at Yonge and Empress. There was also Bentley's Meat Market just a little north of the laundry.

Other stores in the area that I remember are Gailbraith's Hardware and Daly's, the only shoemaker in Willowdale in the 30's. The two barber shops in the area that I remember were Bunn's in Lansing and Graham's in Northmount, close to Finch.

The standard instruction the ladies gave the barber in those times was, 'Please cut my hair half way up the ears and shingle in the back.'


Douglas Wardle



Dempsey Brothers
Yonge and Sheppard
(Lansing, Ontario)

I was born Winifred Young at 237 Bowood Avenue, just south of the city limits, in 1910.

Over the town hall, at Empress and Yonge, there was an auditorium where different meetings were held, including Presbyterian Church services. Church services in those days were also given in peoples' homes.

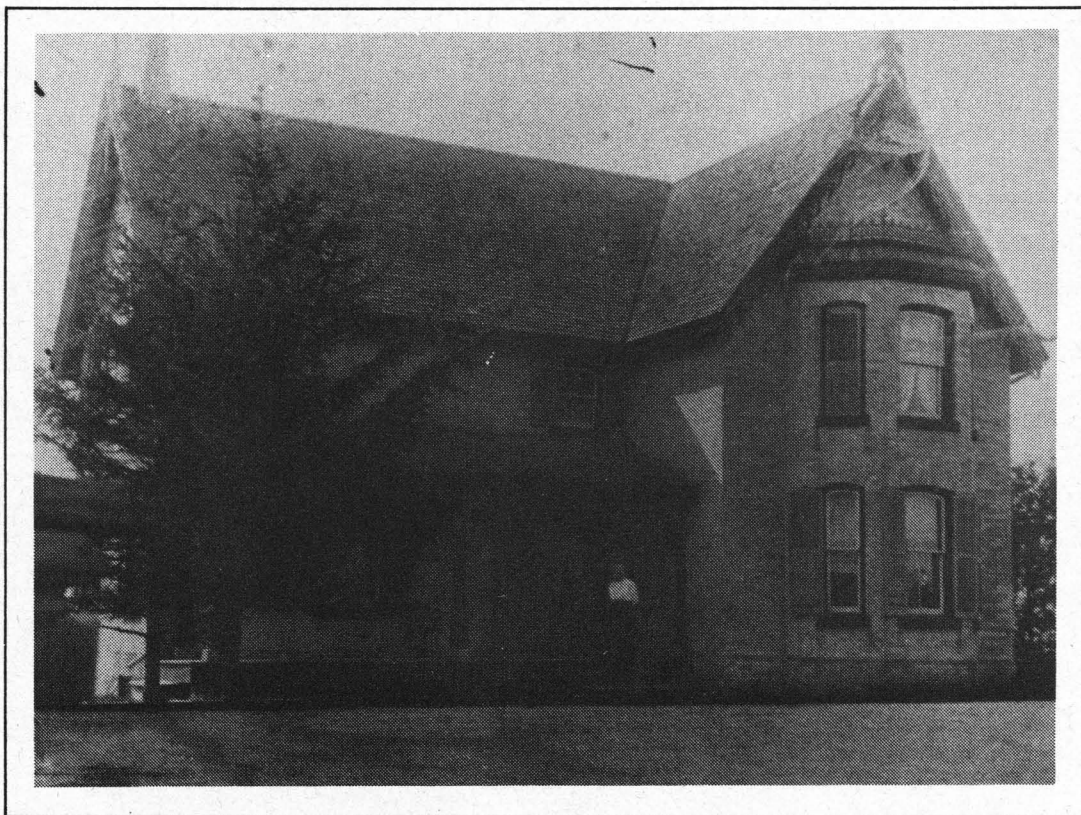
It wasn't until 1928 that the Presbyterian Church was built on Empress Avenue. A Pentecostal Church has now taken over the premises, and the Presbyterian Church is now on Ellerslie Avenue.

My husband started working at Dempsey Brothers Limited in 1922. It was a general store then, and it had just been bought the year before by the Browns. My husband worked in the store for almost 50 years.

In 1927, we went to live on Poyntz Avenue in Lansing. Later, I went to work for J. R. Nelson Grocery Store at 4898 Yonge Street, just north of where the Sheppard Centre now stands. Nelson established his grocery business in 1920 and is still at the same location.

Winifred D. Hood

Winifred Hood



The Manse in Newtonbrook, Ontario
(Where Lester Pearson was born April 23, 1897)

We bought a lot on Patricia Avenue, Newtonbrook in 1934. It was all farm land at the time, and we used this lot to have family picnics on Sundays. In 1936, my husband started to build a house there.

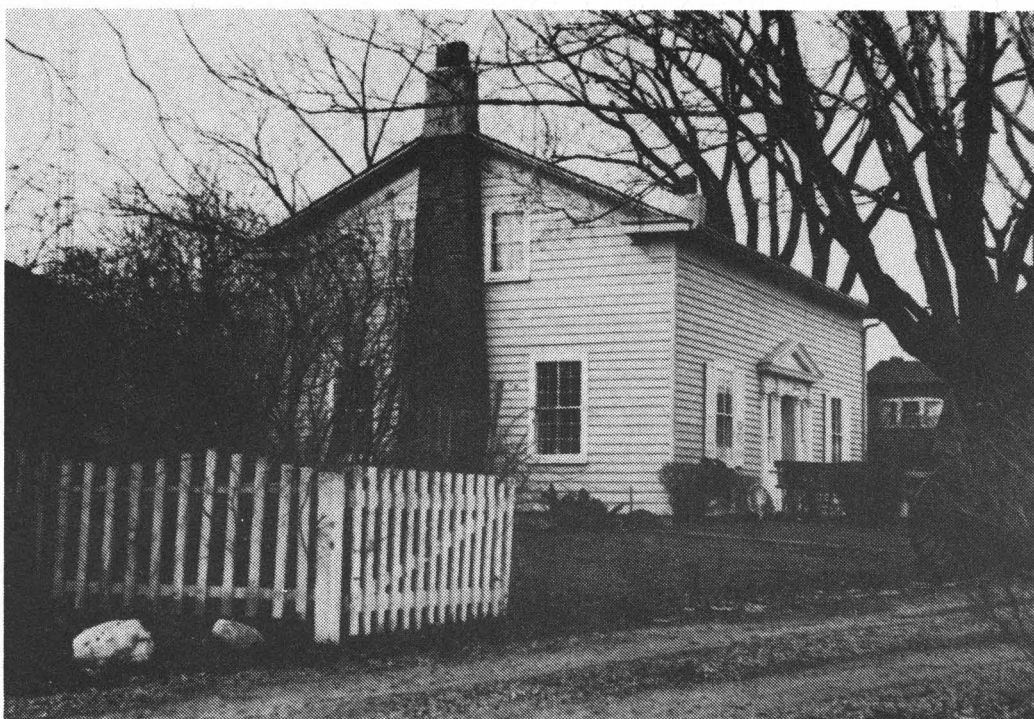
The first year we lived in the house, we had no electricity and for two years there was no water, but we had permission to use a neighbour's pump. We owned a Model-T Ford, but Patricia Avenue was so muddy in the spring and there was so much snow in the winter that we would have to park the car 3/4's of a mile from our home. Sometimes my husband would bring water from the city, and he'd have to carry it on his back in 16-gallon bottles from the car to the house. Other times, he carried coal to heat the house because the trucks couldn't get through the mud or the deep snow.

Even after the water was connected, our troubles weren't over. Our home was frame, not insulated and very cold. I would sometimes sit up all night holding a candle or kerosene lamp under the kitchen pipes so that they wouldn't freeze.

We planted a garden and grew beautiful fruit trees. I would often make as many as 500 jars of preserves from our own plums, apricots and peaches. Once I put some jars of fruit under the dresser in the bedroom to store them for the winter, but they froze and the jars cracked.

Frances Constantino

Frances Constantino



Joseph Sheppard House
90 Burndale Avenue, North York
(One of the original settlers of North York)

I lived on Connaught Avenue which was gravel for three-quarters of a mile back from Yonge Street and after that, dirt track and no surface. Up until the 40's, there were few paved roads other than Sheppard and Yonge Streets. They were gravel or dirt track and often the ditches overflowed, especially in the Newtonbrook area.

In the spring, it was muddy and very often flooded on the side streets. When going to work to catch the trolley or radial car on Yonge Street, you would carry your shoes under your arm and wear a big pair of rubber boots that would come up to your knees. You would leave your boots hidden behind bushes or beside the general store. No one bothered your boots; they were there when you came back.

Road allowances were there but, if there weren't enough taxpayers, the roads didn't go in. It wasn't until after the war that Connaught was finished.

Doug Wardle
Douglas Wardle



Yonge Street looking north from
Lansing, Ontario
(Yonge and Sheppard)

In 1932, my husband and I went to live on Poyntz Avenue, Lansing.

I remember when Dr. Douglas McAteer told me that I had to have my tonsils out. He was one of three doctors practising in the area at the time. There were no hospitals close by, so when it was time for the operation, Dr. McAteer picked me up in his car and took me to his office. After he removed my tonsils, he carried me to his car, drove me home and tucked me in bed.

Dr. McAteer's father was the minister of Lansing United Church. My husband was the choir director at the church for 31 years and I spent a good many years with the choir.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Grace Robinson". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Grace Robinson



York Mills in the valley; Picture taken
looking north to Hoggs Hollow

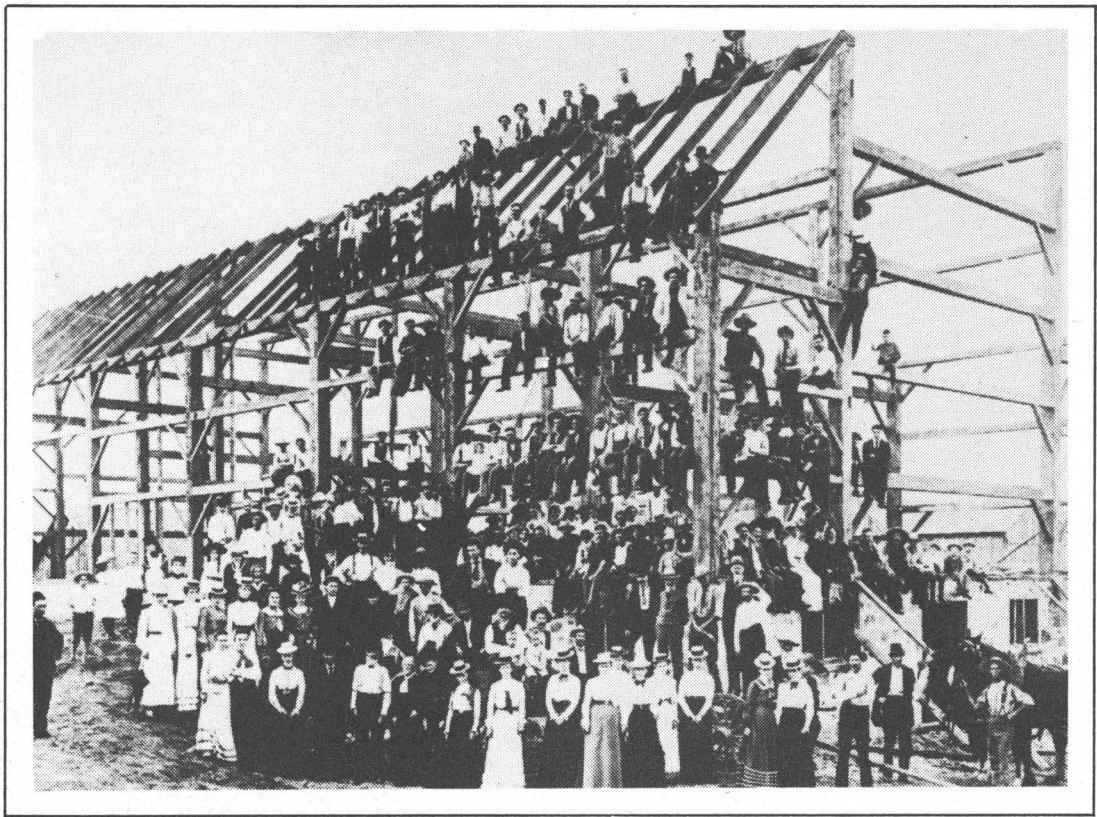
I went to live at 19 John Street, Hoggs Hollow in 1922. The only business establishment there at the time was the Jolly Miller Hotel.

My father was caretaker for the York Mills Public School in 1923. Later, his caretaking duties included the Duke of York School (also known as Bannockburn) and the Baron Renfrew School (also known as York Mills Public School). As a young man, I helped my father by doing most of the work at the Duke of York School. In 1930, my father became boiler inspector for the North York School Board.

The old York Mills School burned down and all its records were lost. The Baron Renfrew School is still standing.

Jack H. Allard

Jack Allard



Bales' Barn Raising

At the age of four, in 1922, our family moved to Bassano Road. Bassano Road is off Franklin Avenue south of Sheppard Avenue, in what used to be called Lansing. Our home is still there.

My maiden name was Riseborough. The Riseborough family has had property in North York for over 100 years. Robert Riseborough had a farm in Newtonbrook. Archibald Riseborough had a farm in Milliken and Will Riseborough had a farm in Markham. Roy Riseborough was the Chief of Police in North York for many years, and is a cousin.

The Bales family were also in the North York area for many years. Dalton Bales at one time was the Member of Parliament for North York.

Velma Richardson

Velma Richardson



Looking north from Sheppard up Yonge Street
(Dempseys Store on left)
(Radial car on right)

I was born at 115 Sheppard Avenue West in Lansing.

In 1924, my father, George McNeil owned the Excelsior Garage and for six years, it was the only garage from the city limits to Richmond Hill. He also sold cars, built houses and tried politics.

My dad bought a radio in 1932. I remember neighbours and friends came to listen to our radio especially on Saturday nights for the hockey games. One Saturday night stays in my mind because the house seemed to be full of people until three or four o'clock in the morning while the longest game in the National Hockey League took place.

A fun memory I have was when my brother Don and I took my father's wrench and opened up a fire hydrant to flood a field so that we could skate. We skated in the field all winter, and they never did find out who turned on the hydrant.

Pearl Adair

Pearl Adair

