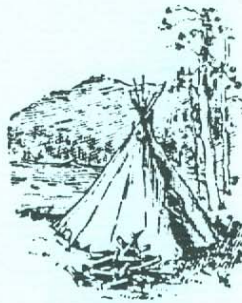


**BEING A HISTORY OF
124 DANFORTH AVENUE
TORONTO**



THE INDIANS




INDIAN WIGWAM.

For centuries the forests along the shore of Lake Ontario where the city of Toronto now stands had remained the domain of the Indians who had villages at the mouths of the Don, the Humber and the Rouge Rivers. The Indians called the Don *Wonscoteonoch*, meaning black burnt lands.

Present-day Withrow Avenue east of the Don was once the site of a large Indian village, and Henry Scadding writing in Toronto of Old recounted how Sugar Loaf Hill, a conical-shaped hill on the west side of the Don at Bloor Street, was "*an immense Indian tumulus for the dead.*" Below Sugar Loaf Hill was the ford of the Don where men had crossed the river since earliest times. During the French régime the ford was on the trail to Montreal, used by Indians, fur traders and explorers alike.


The first person to have left a record of the Don River was Father Pierre Rafflix, a Jesuit explorer who included it on his map of the north shore of Lake Ontario in 1688. The first English map employed another Indian name for the river, *Necheng Qua Kekonk*, which appeared on a survey map drawn up by Alexander Aitken in 1788 showing the lands to be included in the *Toronto Purchase*. Aitken reported the river navigable for 2 or 3 miles from the mouth. The following year Hypolite La Force, a French trader who had switched allegiance to the English at the cessation of hostilities, surveyed the north shore of Lake Ontario and left some comments concerning the Don: "*Went into the swamp at the bottom of the Bay and into a small river running NNW for near 2 miles...it is deep and then winding.....There is good timber and Pine on its banks.*"

THE ARRIVAL OF THE BRITISH

 n 1787 the British negotiated with the local Mississauga chiefs to purchase the land which to-day covers the greater Metropolitan Toronto area. The agreement was known as the *Toronto Purchase*. When Upper Canada became a separate province in 1791, John Graves Simcoe was appointed the new lieutenant-governor. He arrived at York with his wife Elizabeth in 1793 on a ship fittingly called the *Mississauga*. The vista which met the eyes of the passengers was recorded by Captain Bouchette who wrote of "*...the untamed aspect which the country exhibited when I first entered the beautiful basin...Dense and trackless forests lined the margin of the Lake and reflected their inverted images in its glossy surface.*" The forest immediately adjacent to the shore was not to last long. Simcoe's first orders were to clear ground for Fort York and then to proceed with the clearance of a military road leading north, which was to be called Yonge Street.

Arriving in 1793 with the Simcoe's was Colonel George Playter, one of the new lieutenant-governor's intimate friends. As late as 1791-92 George Playter held the important position of Governor of Maryland. He decided to seek a new life in Upper Canada, probably at the express invitation of Simcoe who recruited leading Loyalists after the American Revolution. Colonel Playter and his son Captain James Playter had first emigrated from Maryland to Kingston before moving to York, where he received his land grant on the west side of the Don River in 1793.

THE FIRST LANDOWNER

 cross the river opposite the property belonging to his father, James Playter (1776?-1809) was given a grant of land from the Crown on August 24, 1796. This land consisted of 200 acres and was Lot 11, Concession 2 from the Bay. In 1798 the The Gazette Oracle noted in its edition of December 29: "*Married last Monday, Mr. James Playter to the agreeable Miss Hannah Miles, daughter of Mr. Abner Miles of this town.*" Abner Miles was one of the earliest tavern keepers of York, and James was also associated with the tavern business with his brother Eli.

The Playter family was active in the little settlement. The York Minutes of Town Meetings and Lists of Inhabitants 1797-1823 mentioned James' appointment as "*overseer of highways*" at the Town Meeting held at Miles' Tavern in March of 1798. His name appears in the List of Inhabitants as residing on the Don in 1798. By 1799 there is a listing for 1 male and 1 female under his name. The 1800 listing shows his address is York and not the Don, indicating his move from the area. In 1801 he was elected Assessor at the Town Meeting which was "*held at the House of Messrs. J. & E. Playter.*" It would seem that James was now living at the home of his brother, although he still owned the Danforth property. Eli was elected Town Clerk at the same meeting.

The principal discussion at this meeting was the management of the "*hogg*" problem. Mature hogs, running at large, were annoying the citizens of the town. Permission was granted to allow people to confine them, advertise their capture, and if there was no response within a short period of time, then the hogs were to be sold and the money forwarded to the Town Treasurer. This was no laughing matter; the problem persisted and was once again brought up at the Town Meeting of 1802.

James was appointed as a committee member to oversee the improvement of Yonge Street north of Queen in 1800. Serving on the same committee charged with raising subscription funds for the improvements were Secretary William Jarvis and William Allen, both influential men. The road work was proposed to assist farmers to the north to transport their produce to market "*with more ease than is practicable at present*". (The Gazette, December 20, 1800). Apparently James believed that the road improvements would indeed come to pass, seeing that he himself was in charge of the operation. He moved to Richmond Hill around 1802, as did his father-in-law, Abner Miles. James farmed, and Abner opened another tavern and general store. The last entry in the York List of Inhabitants for James Playter was in the year 1808, with 1 man, 1 woman and 4 male children under 16. It must have been difficult for the little family when James died the following year at the age of 33, leaving them to manage on their own on a pioneer farm.

MRS. SIMCOE'S DIARY



ne of the most revealing and delightful records of life in Toronto's first days is to be found in the diary of the wife of the lieutenant-governor. There are numerous references to the Playters, because of the close association George Playter had with her husband. Mrs. Simcoe gives very realistic accounts of the Don river area where she and the "Gov." chose to build a chalet they named *Castle Frank* after their little boy Francis. Following are some pertinent excerpts:

June 1, 1795 - "I went in a boat to Francis' estate, Castle Frank. I drank tea at Playter's."

July 4, 1796 - "Playter was haymaking."

July 6, 1796 - "I passed Playter's picturesque bridge over the Donn, it is a butternut tree fallen across the river the branches still growing in full leaf. Mrs. Playter being timorous, a pole was fastened through the branches to hold by. Having attempted to pass it, I was determined to proceed, but was frightened before I got half way."



Reproduced here is the picture of the butternut tree bridge with its hand-rail, painted by Mrs. Simcoe. She enjoyed exploring the river and discovering its flowers, birds and animals. Accompanied by young Mr. Talbot, Simcoe's secretary, or officers on her husband's staff, she would go horseback riding in good weather and in winter would take to her sleigh over the frozen river.

July 10, 1796 - "Rode very pleasantly through the Pine plains, gathered tea berries. I saw the musquito Hawk's nest, at least the eggs and young birds lying on pieces of bark on the ground.....I walked down the Hill in the evening and gathered Dragon's Blood, Lychmas de Canada, Trylliums, toothache plant, Liquorice, wild berries, etc."

July 14, 1796 - "Walked through the Meadows towards Coon's. Saw millions of the yellow and black butterflies, New York Swallowtails, and heaps of their wings lying about. Gathered wild gooseberries and when they were stewed found them an excellent sauce for salmon."

July 20, 1796 - "Called at Playter's. Took leave of Castle Frank."

With this last entry we see Mrs. Simcoe in the process of saying good-bye to York and Canada. On her last day at York, July 21, 1796, she mentions other good-byes, reports that she could not eat and that she cried all day. Her love affair with the little community and the wild scenery that lay just beyond its doorsteps had moved her greatly.



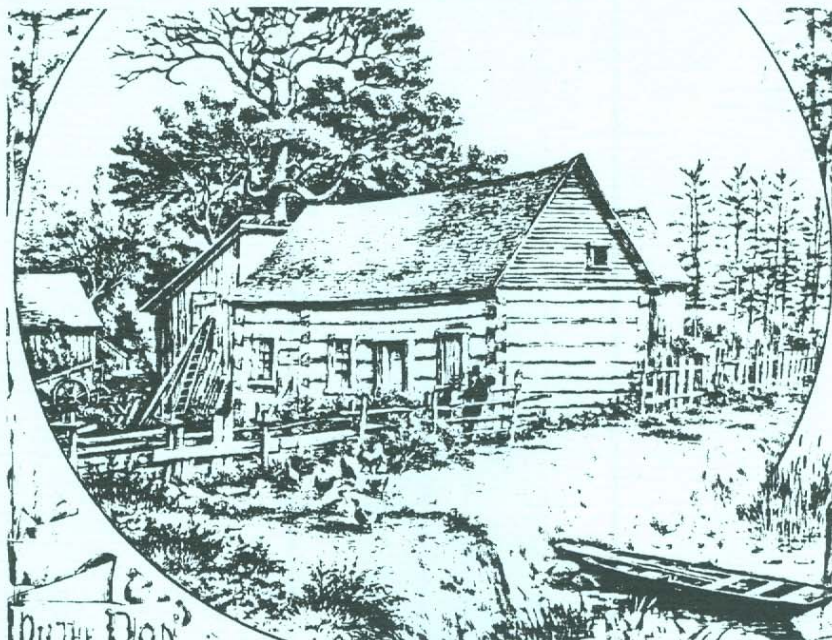
Castle Frank at York (right) had a classical façade with pillars of peeled tree-trunks, but the interior was never finished. The Simcoes loved it and went there for picnics in summer and winter.

BROTHER JOHN



aptain George Playter had 5 sons and 5 daughters. Three of the sons received land grants along the Don in 1796. James' had Lot 11 which to-day would extend from the river to Donlands Avenue and from Danforth to Browning Avenues. Ely had the next lot north, Lot 12, and John received as his grant, Lot 17, which would have been in the Eglinton area. However, John apparently never lived there. The Toronto historian, Henry Scadding, stated that he settled across the river from his father, George Playter. Charles Sauriol in his book, Remembering the Don states that Captain John Playter "*resided on the east side of the valley, approximately near the angle of Cambridge and Danforth Avenues.*" How can we account for John not living on his own grant of land ?

According to the land registry, **John Playter (1770-1853)** did not buy the 200 acre Danforth property until 1831, when he paid James' son, Aaron, £227.0.0 for it. It is unlikely that the land had remained undeveloped from the time when James had moved away in 1800. The most plausible scenario is that John lived on and farmed his brother's land, for many years before the purchase. Henry Scadding verifies that for a number of years John occupied the Scadding cabin south of Queen on the east side of the Don. John Playter and his father shared the management of John Scadding's property from 1796 until 1818 while Scadding was in England. John likely leased Lot 17 to be cleared and farmed by someone else. He does not seem to have ever lived there himself.



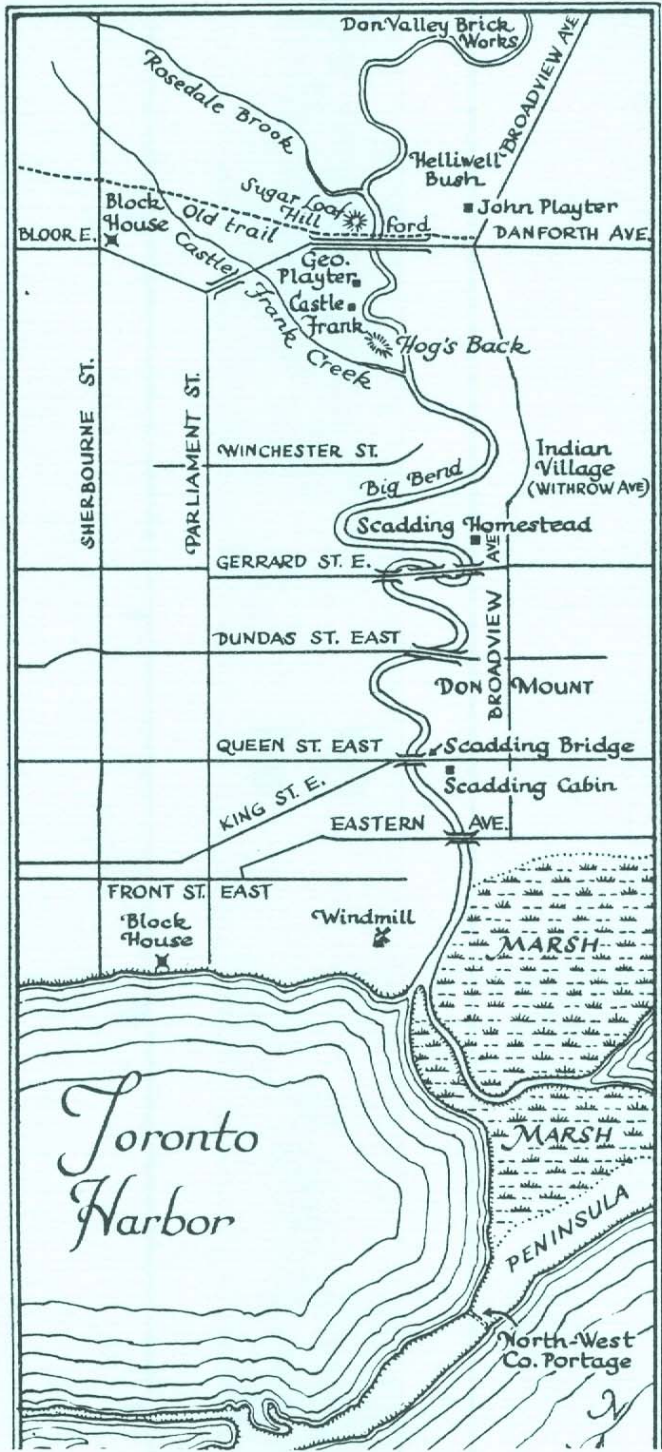
ON THE DON
The Scadding cabin pictured in this old print was removed from the Don at Queen Street to Exhibition Park in 1879. The cabin was built in 1794 by William Smith for John Scadding.

John Scadding was the manager of the Simcoe Estate in England and had come out to Canada with the Governor. His land grant was Lot 15, of the Broken Front which extended from the Bay to the First Concession Line, (now the Danforth). This meant that his property bordered James Playter's property.

John Playter married Sarah Ellerbeck. Their first child, Emmanuel, was born in the Scadding cottage, the same cottage which to-day stands on the Exhibition grounds and is recognized as Toronto's oldest building.

According to the York Minutes of Town Meetings and Lists of Inhabitants 1797 - 1823 John Playter was first living on the Don in 1801, the year James moved to York. In 1802 he was elected "*overseer of highways for the Don from the Bay Road to the Mills.*" The Mill Road had opened in 1799 and led to the mills of Parshall Terry. The year 1805 saw John the town assessor. By 1808 John and his wife Sarah had 3 male and 3 female children under 16 years. He held the position of overseer again in 1809, 1812 and 1814. His family continued to grow to 7 children in 1813, and 10 in 1817. The Scadding cabin must have long since ceased to be spacious enough to accommodate this brood, and logic (or necessity) suggests that a larger home may have been built on his brother's Lot 11 sometime before the return of Scadding from England.

The town of York was threatened with destruction by the American invasion during the War of 1812. The concerned leaders attempted to hide the archives from the invaders. "*Many of the archives were conveyed for safe-keeping to the houses of (Captains George and John Playter). But boats with men and officers of the invading force, found their way up the windings of the Don, and such papers and documents as could be found were carried away.*" (Toronto of Old, by Henry Scadding). This excerpt suggests that the homes were close to each other by this time.



RICHARD ELLERBECK PLAYTER - LAWYER TURNED FARMER



he Land Registry indicates an interesting transaction involving John's son, **Richard Playter** (___?-1871). First there is the apparent sale of the 200 acres for £5000 in 1839, then twelve years later Richard is on record as having paid his father a mere £800 for the west half of Lot 11. Perhaps it was the balance owing. In 1855, after their father's death, the brothers Richard, John and Emmanuel authorized the Provincial Land Surveyor to draw up an official plan of the family property. Meanwhile, John Playter's will had left the entire lot to his wife Sarah. The apparent confusion required a family settlement, which is probably why the plan was drawn up.

Richard, who did become the owner of the west part of his father's estate, had been well-educated in Toronto schools, there being no local school yet. He may have attended Upper Canada College as a boarder in the days when it operated as the *establishment* school from its site on King Street. Later he had gone on to study law. He married Mary Lea in 1845, and they produced 9 children. Bad health apparently led him to give up his law career, and he turned to farming.

In his time, Richard Playter served as Deputy Reeve of York Township, as a member on the County Council and as Magistrate. Known as a charitable man, he gave land to the Church Society of the Diocese of Toronto and to St. Barnabas Anglican Church, which was built on present-day Ellerbeck Street.

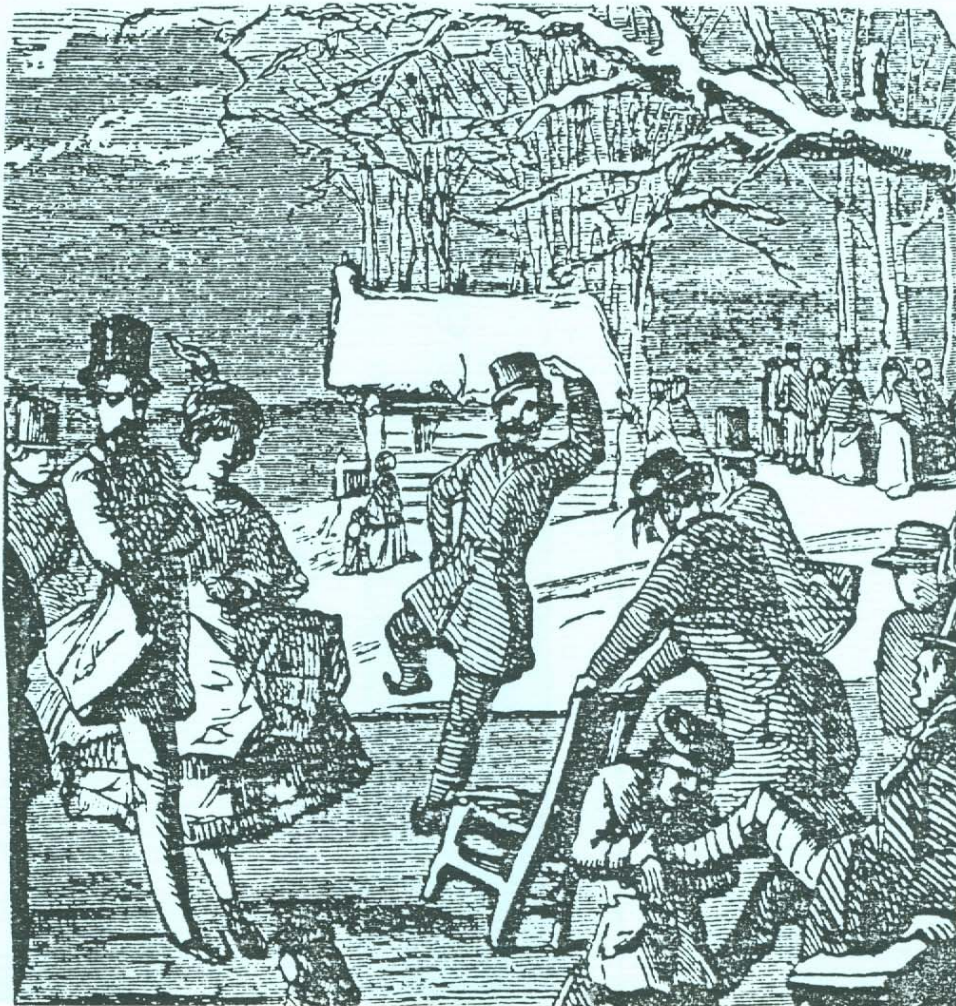
THE DANFORTH



et us take a look backwards in time to the beginnings of the Danforth area. The Avenue took its name from Asa Danforth, the man charged by York's Administrator, Peter Russell, with opening the road east connecting York with Kingston. Although the road he opened was really along Queen Street to Kingston Road as far as the Trent River, history has assigned his name to Danforth Avenue. The settlement that grew up along the Don and Danforth, as the road was first known, was named after its main street. It was remarkably isolated from Toronto until the 20th century when the Prince Edward Viaduct was built in 1915. Throughout the 19th century the community slumbered alongside its dusty country road, content with the life that bordered it.

The Don River has always been one of the realities of life at this corner of the Danforth, but perhaps moreso in the last century. In 1850 a major spring flood carried away the main bridges, further isolating the Playters of the Danforth from Toronto. Again in 1878 the so-called *Great Rainstorm* wiped out all 5 bridges and covered the flood plain. Most of the mills along the river were destroyed, and the debris of chicken-coops, trees, furniture and damaged saw mills floated downstream.

The river could also be a friend to the local people, providing generous supplies of fish in summer and in winter offering its frozen surface for their sleighs. *"Down the river.....every day came a cavalcade of strong sleighs, heavily laden, some with cordwood, some with sawn lumber, some with hay, southerly towards the Bay."* (Toronto of Old, Henry Scadding). Another writer, C. C. Taylor in Toronto Called Back recalled the joy of winter pleasures: *"One cannot imagine how animated and brilliant is Toronto when she puts on her snowshoes and gets herself up on runners and fills all the air with the chimes of sleigh bells."* Of course, the river in winter also provided generations of skaters with a lovely sheet of ice for their Sunday outings. Riverdale became a public park in 1856 when the city purchased the Scadding estate.



THE TOWN PLANNER MCMURRICH



y 1859 the Playter family was preparing to sell off a portion of the western part of Lot 11 to a developer who wanted to establish the village of Chester. The eastern part of Lot 11 would remain as larger lots for market gardens. The signatures of a number of Playters appear on the transaction granting **John McMurrich** all 220 acres, with certain exceptions. (How the 20 extra originated is unexplained.) The signatories were : Sarah, (mother), Emmanuel, Susan, John and Richard Ellerbeck Playter. McMurrich was not granted 18 acres "*conveyed to different parties*" (probably family members) nor 2 acres belonging to A. Scadding. It would seem that there must have been some sort of agreement at an earlier date whereby Scadding and Playter properties were adjoined at least in part.

The enclosed second Plan of Lot 11, Plan 257, was dated November 30th, 1859 and signed by John McMurrich, Proprietor. For 12 years the major portion of the Playter lands on the Danforth was outside the family circle. For the first time the streets and lots of the proposed Village of Chester were laid out including the lots which show the location of the building at 124 Danforth today. The plan shows the first buildings along Danforth, and it will be noted that Lots 1, 2, and 12 (the site of the present building at 124 Danforth Avenue) are vacant.

Very little is on record concerning McMurrich except that he was the Hon. John McMurrich, MLC (Member of the Legislative Council), who had been born in Scotland. He had 2 distinguished sons, one of whom, William B. McMurrich, became Mayor of Toronto in 1881-82. His brother John, born the year that McMurrich acquired the Playter property, was a noted anatomy professor at the University of Toronto. John McMurrich Sr. and his wife, Janet, re-sold some of this Danforth property to the Playters in 1871. In the meantime, of course, numerous people had purchased small lots in the Village of Chester.

RETURN OF THE LAND TO THE PLAYTER FAMILY



John Lea Playter (1845-1922), the oldest child of Richard and Mary, born the year of their marriage, joined with his father to undertake a repurchase. He purchased part of the property for \$2683.20, with Richard paying \$6600 for the land extending from Ellerbeck (i.e. the western portion of Playter lands). An entry in the Toronto Directory of 1883 lists Mary Playter, widow of Richard A. (probably a mistake) living in a house on the east side of Mill Road. Those listed as boarding at her home were John L., Albert E. and William E. Playter, her sons.

John Lea Playter, according to his obituary in the Globe on January 23, 1922, died at his residence on Jackman Avenue. The paper mentioned his United Empire Loyalist grandparents and the fact that they had been original settlers in this area. He himself had been born on the old homestead near the Don River. He was "*identified with the progress of the ... family lands.*" Following family tradition, he was a member of St. Barnabas Anglican Church, the church established on land donated by his father. The newspaper noted that his last public appearance had been at the *West Danforth Business Men's Parade* the previous summer.

The year 1887 saw the family involved in a major court case which went to the High Court of Justice. The plaintiffs were the widow and children of Richard Playter vs. the Executors for the Estate of John McMurrich. From this certificate we learn the names of Richard Playter's many children: John Lea, Elizabeth, Richard G., William, Margaret J., Albert, Emily, Charlotte and Meliss. After the court case was settled, John Lea and his wife Mary Jane shared the property (i.e. where 124 Danforth stands) with all the above members of the family in 1889. The name Permilla S. Playter is added to the list of brothers and sisters for the first time. Her relationship to them is not known.

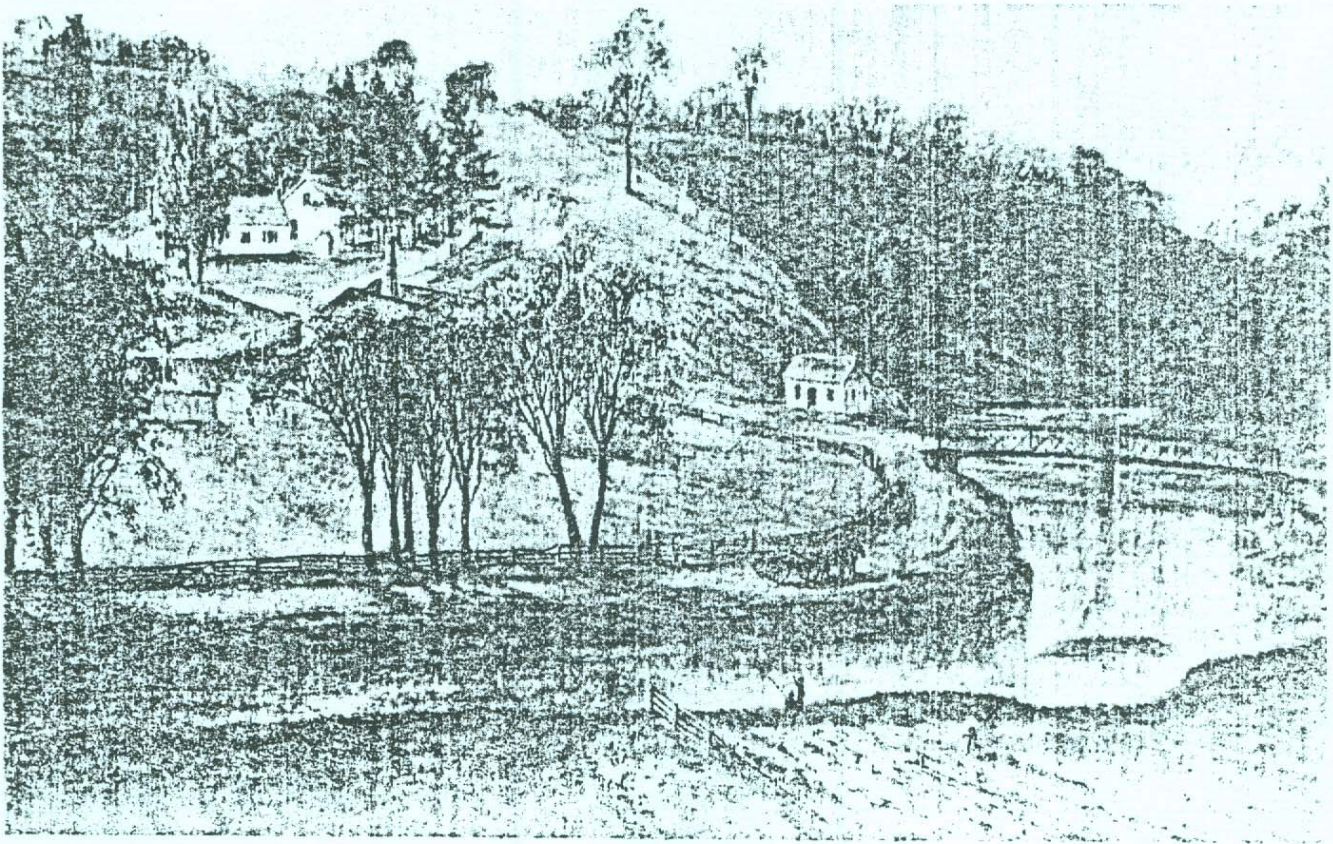
LIFE ALONG THE DANFORTH

Until 1884 the road was known as the Don and Danforth Road. In mid-century the Don and Danforth Road Co. undertook the job of planking it from Old Danforth Road at Markham Road in Scarboro along to what is now Broadview Avenue. To cover the cost of these improvements there was a toll gate on the southwest corner of Broadview and Danforth. Over the years the road deteriorated to dirt and gravel, so that by the 1880's *"It was a typical country road, dusty in summer and muddy in wet weather, while in winter often blocked with snow drifts."* (Danforth Avenue in Old Days, an article by J. McPherson Ross in the Evening Telegram in 1920). There used to be a blacksmith's shop at Broadview, and at Ellerbeck stood an old country inn, the *Danforth Hotel*. It was a favourite dancing spot for parties of young people from the city who had been sleighing on the hills or skating on the river. Political rallies were also held there. St. Barnabas Church to the north was surrounded by the Playter Dairy Farm. Opposite Logan's Lane on the north side of the Danforth was a clump of woods called *Playter's Grove*, which was a delightful spot for Sunday School picnics, or Temperance outings in the summertime.



All those little Playter children had to go to school somewhere, as did the other children who lived along the Danforth. Their first local school was not built until 1856. It was located at O'Connor Drive and Donlands Avenue, the northern limit of Lot 11. Chester Public School was built in 1890, which was certainly closer to home for the Playter youngsters. It had 3 classrooms on the first floor and an auditorium on the second for concerts and community events.

THE LIFE OF THE RIVER



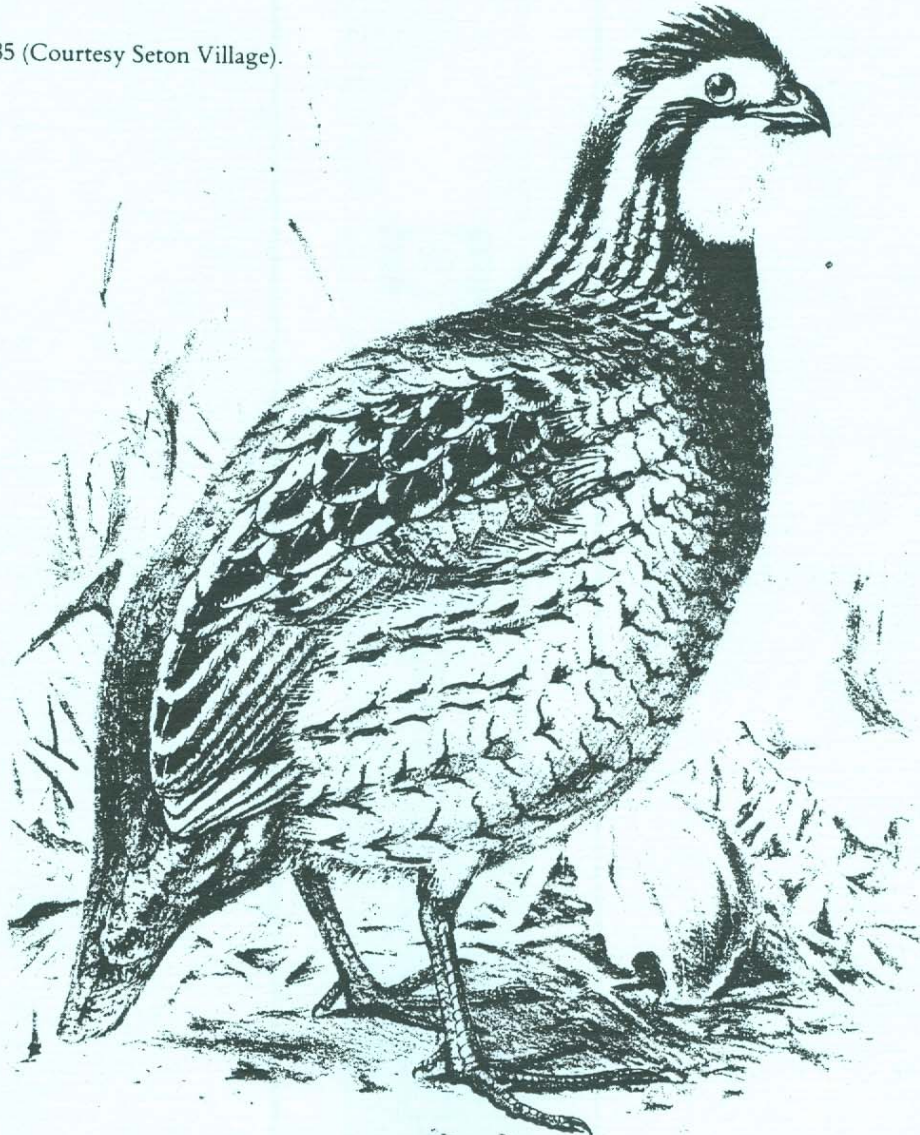
AT THE BOX VALLEY. Artist unknown.

This isolated picture was probably executed in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century.



In the 1870's, when Ernest Thompson Seton, the author-artist, was just a 14 year old boy, he began his rambles along the Don near his home, as other area boys and girls before and after him have done. He built himself a hideout in the valley where he played at being an Indian. His private territory was in the Castle Frank ravine below Chorley Park. This boyhood fantasy-life was, as he later wrote, "*the beginning of the Boy Scouts.*" (from a letter dated June 9, 1945 to Charles Sauriol.) He was closely involved with Baden-Powell in setting up the Boy Scout organization. In later years he was to become famous for his animal stories which enchanted generations of children. At least two of his books, *Two Little Savages* and *Wild Animals I Have Known* were based on these experiences and observations in the Don Valley. One endearing character he introduced was *Ruff, the Don Valley Partridge.*

Grouse study, c. 1885 (Courtesy Seton Village).



Passenger pigeons used to flock by the thousands over the Don River. Mrs. Simcoe made mention of them in an entry: "*The flights of wild pigeons in the spring and autumn is (sic) a surprising sight.*" (April 10, 1796). Seton left us a more detailed impression of the great flocks. From his bedroom window overlooking the Don River he witnessed their last flight. "*I shall never forget the last great horde that passed over, it was in 1876 about April 20th. An army of pigeons flew overhead due north....There must have been hundreds of thousands in that flock and it was succeeded by others of similar extent every half hour for most of the day...it was the last of the great flocks that, according to record, ever came over Toronto.*" The last single bird died in a Cincinnati zoo in 1912.


The river was also home to a great abundance of fish, especially salmon. When the Simcoes were here hundreds could be taken at a time. Dr. Scadding recorded 20 heavy salmon speared in an hour. In 1821 William Lea, Mary's father, described the Don as a river"*inhabited by various kinds of fish, large quantities of suckers in early spring and in the latter part of the summer by the finest salmon which were taken in great numbers sometimes weighing 25 lbs. each..... They were caught by being trapped under the mill dams and water wheels of the mills, but were generally caught with a spear with prongs of steel.*" The salmon were doomed to disappear, because of the numerous dams and mill ponds which prevented the fish from reaching the spawning grounds. By 1856 there were 22 mills on the west and east branches of the Don. The last recorded spearing of salmon was in 1874 under the dam at Taylor's Mills (Pottery Road).

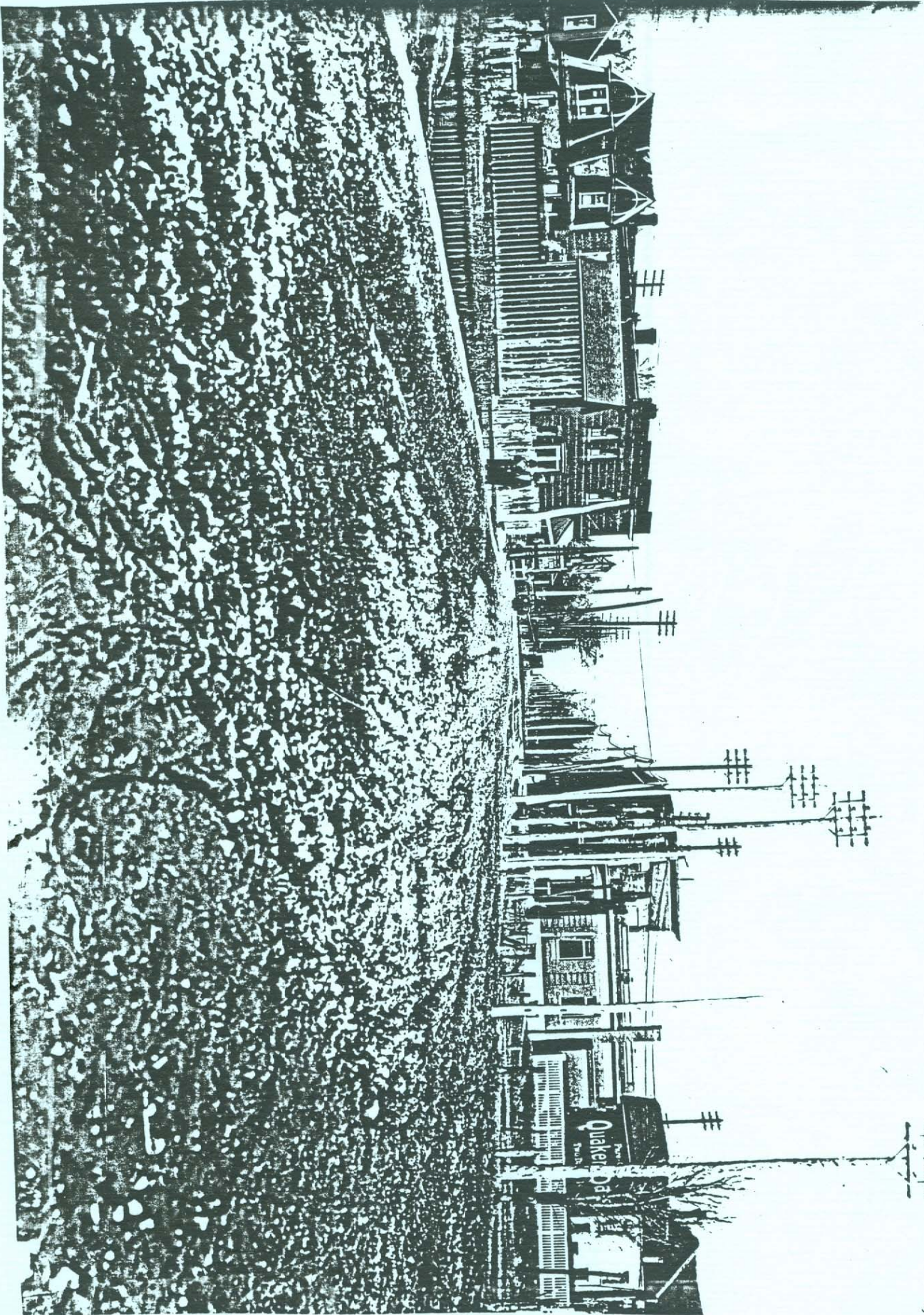
Not only fish and wildlife inhabited the valley, nor were farm families, such as the Playters, the only people. There used to be runaway slaves from the United States in the valley and many of them worked in the paper mills. There were also roving gangs of toughs who ranged the valley. The Brooks Bush Gang flourished around 1862, hanging out in the woods to the east of the Don over some 40 acres. They gambled, held cock fights, drank and harassed the unwary who ventured into their territory. One spring day young Seton returned to his hideout to find it inhabited by tramps who wrecked it when they left. He never used it again.

Artists and hikers were the new explorers of the branches of the Don at the turn of the century and were to form clubs reflecting their passion for the area. *The Don Valley Nature Study Club* and *The Don Valley School of Art* flourished for many years. John McArthur was the first conservationist of the Don, and well-known artists such as Manley Macdonald, Owen Staples and C. W. Jeffreys left us a record of its early beauty.

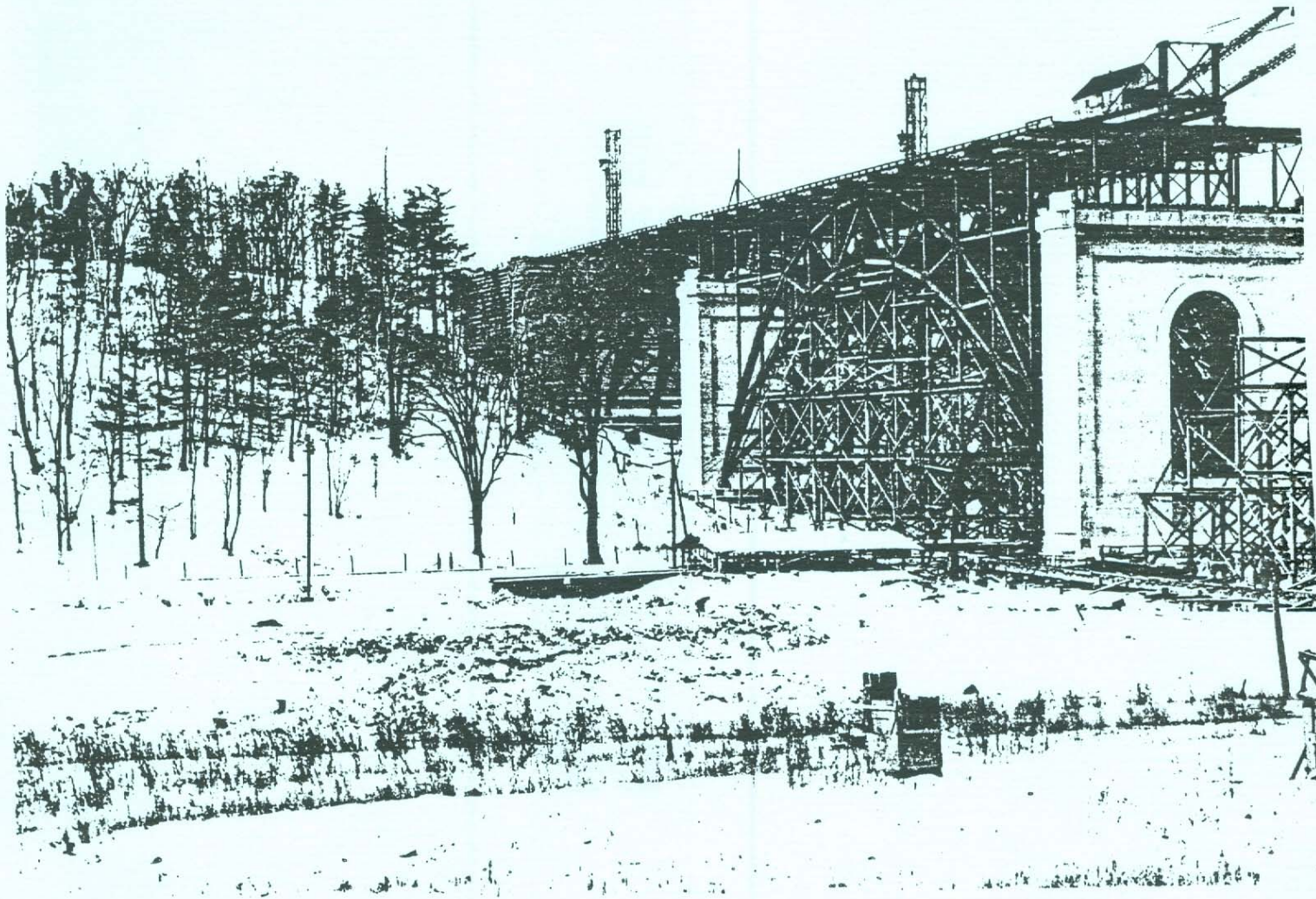
The Don River even had a few brief moments in history when it was suggested that its waters could provide drinking water for the City of Toronto. *The Keefer Plan* of 1847 outlined how the Humber and the Don Rivers could provide 24 million cubic feet of water daily. The Plan died at the discussion tables, but a similar plan was brought forth again in 1887 when the city's requirements had grown to 12 million gallons of water daily. This second plan was the brain-child of two civil engineers, McAlpine and Tully, who left a statement on the quality of water from the Don for posterity. "*If the water supply from north of Toronto is objectionable on account of supposed pollution from farmyards, farm houses, outbuildings, villages and graveyards, how much more objectionable the waters of Lake Ontario which are a natural reservoir for pollution of all kinds, etc.....*" Once again the plan died as the politicians deliberated. It is difficult to believe that the poor, polluted Don, as it flows to-day, could have once been considered a source of drinking water.

THE EARLY YEARS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

ith the turn of the century John Lea Playter, Mary Jane, his wife, William E. and Albert E. Playter granted their 4 sisters 1/8 share each of the property. In 1909 a major event occurred in the area with the annexation of the north side of Danforth Avenue to the City of Toronto. A City By-Law to widen Danforth in 1911 claimed 20 feet of the frontage of these lots. (There is also a note that the family was acting as executors of Permilla S. Playter.) The next year Danforth was macadamized as far as Pape Avenue. The condition of the road before that time can be appreciated from the accompanying photograph. The Danforth was on the verge of a new era, introduced by the building of the Prince Edward Viaduct, begun in 1915 and finished in 1918. The year 1916 saw the property belonging to Permilla, Lots 1 & 2, transferred to **Albert E. Playter**.



Newburgh Ave near Broadway. looking east (N198) #116
 1910



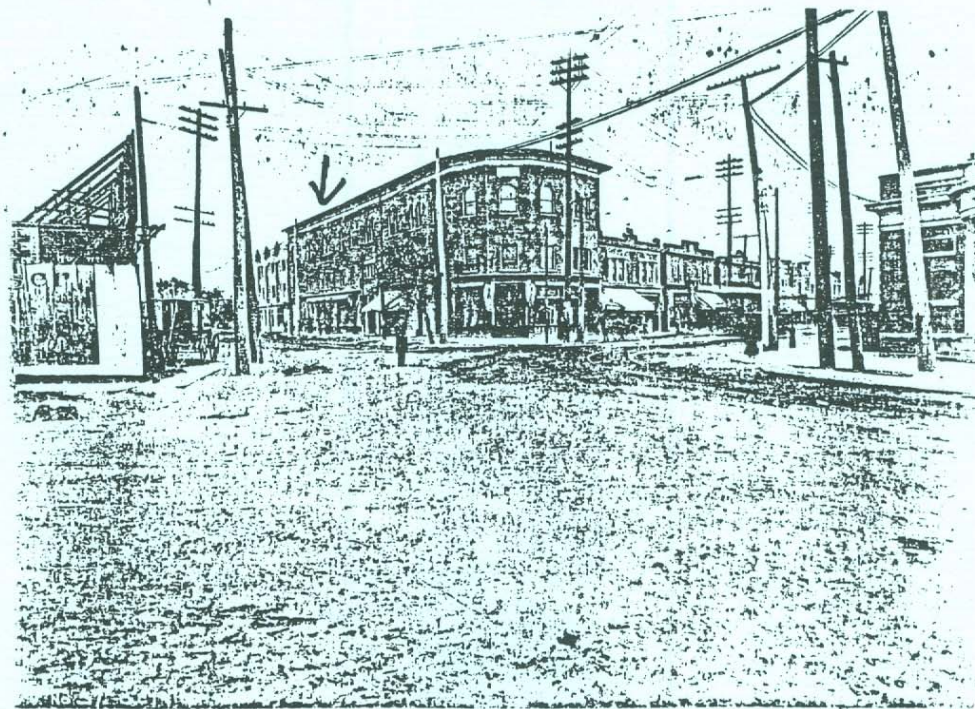
**The Prince Edward Viaduct
under construction, 1916**

In 1909, a planning report had recommended that a bridge be built across the Don in the Castle Frank area and connected by an avenue running diagonally to downtown. This latter was never built, and Toronto maintained its square grid street pattern. But the bridge to the Danforth was constructed between 1915 and 1918 at a cost of \$2 million; Bloor Street was extended from Sherbourne to meet it. The idea of rapid transit was 'in the air' at the time, and Jacob and Davies,

recommended that the city build a subway system and that openings for subway trains be incorporated in the design of the viaduct. They were, but no subway trains passed through them for about fifty years: the first Bloor trains ran in 1966.

Connecting Danforth to the City had always been considered difficult if not impossible. Dr. Scadding in 1873 had written about the ford of the Don, "*in line with a concession road which had been closed by Act of Parliament on the ground of its supposed impracticability forever, a proceeding to be regretted as the highway which would traverse the Don Valley at the ford would be a continuation of Bloor Street in a right line and would form a convenient means of communication between Chester and Yorkville.*" (Toronto of Old) When the bridge was built some called it *a bridge to nowhere*. It cost \$2 000 000, "*a magnificent ribbon of concrete and curving steel.*" (The Toronto That Used To Be, by Rae Corelli)

A streetcar line had been opened from Broadview to Coxwell in 1915, and the children got free rides. Crowds cheered the first run of the streetcars. Before the bridge opened, the streetcar ride into Toronto was time-consuming, as passengers had to go south to Gerrard Street then transfer to a Carlton car which went west to Parliament, then north on Parliament to Carlton and west on Carlton to Yonge Street. If you wanted to get to Queen Street, you had to transfer to a Yonge car and travel south. The trip could take up to two hours. No wonder Danforth people were thrilled with the opening of the viaduct bridge!



1 Broadview Ave. and Danforth Ave. looking East.
 { Right Foreground - Metropolitan Bank #1 Danforth Ave.
 Centre - Dr. H. Peckler (Dentist) #3 Danforth Ave.
 Right Centre - Broadview Ave.

FIG. P/V No 37

Oct. 18, 1912.

- 20 -

(Playter Hall centre)

THE PLAYTORIUM



Albert and his brother William were eager to commercially develop their property along the Danforth in the early years of the century. They anticipated the immense growth which was about to burst upon the area. They first built *Playter Hall* on the south side of Danforth at Broadview in 1907. This large building housed stores on the ground floor, doctor and dentist offices on the second and a hall on the third floor for card parties and lodge meetings. It was torn down a few years later when the north side of the street was annexed to the City.

The brothers seemed to have appreciated the need for a public place for relaxation and entertainment. With this in mind, Albert took out a Building Permit in September, 1910 to erect a 2 storey brick *Theatorium* and dwelling near Broadview on the north side of Danforth. He himself would be the builder. The cost of the building was estimated at \$3500. A second Building Permit was issued the following year in October to erect a 1 storey brick addition to the *Theatorium* on 56 Danforth Avenue. The cost was estimated at \$1000. The address given was the one used until 1922 when the numbering system was changed.

The Toronto Directory lists Robert Wilson, Amusements, in 1912 and 1913 at 56 Danforth. This is the first mention of the building which provided vaudeville entertainment in its early days under the name of the *Playter Fun House*. The *Sketch Plan of the Playtorium Theatre*, (enclosed), provides the year 1914 as the date when conversion to a movie theatre was planned. It also, incidentally, gives the wrong address. The year 1916 saw Jane E. Lawson, Amusements, at number 56, with the new name, *The Playtorium*, in place in the 1918 edition of the Toronto Directory. The people mentioned were probably living in the dwelling part of the building.

The bridge to the City changed Danforth dramatically in a few short years. The population was still made up of those of British backgrounds, but the newcomers were largely of the lower middle class moving into inexpensive homes in these newly opened suburbs. By 1924 the main surge of growth had passed, and the retail strip was similar to today's, except for the names. The well-to-do were living in the Broadview area, on the *Playter Estates*. The family was no longer in the market garden business, but the family home at 28 Playter Crescent, built ca. 1875, was a reminder of the original owners.

The people of this area had always enjoyed life in the form of outdoor sports, and social encounters with lodge groups and societies of various sorts. There had been an inn down the way and the *Playter Hall* for a few years where concerts were held, and the vaudeville amusement building first opened by the Playter family. Now the folks could enjoy not only vaudeville but that new entertainment - movies! The *Playtorium* was the first movie house (1917) to open in the Broadview neighbourhood, closely followed by the Allen "Danforth" Theatre at 147 Danforth in 1919. By 1921 there were 5 movie theatres between Broadview and Pape. The *Playtorium* operated until 1924 as a movie theatre. Only the largest movie theatres or the chains advertised in the papers, and this was done in the category of "amusements".

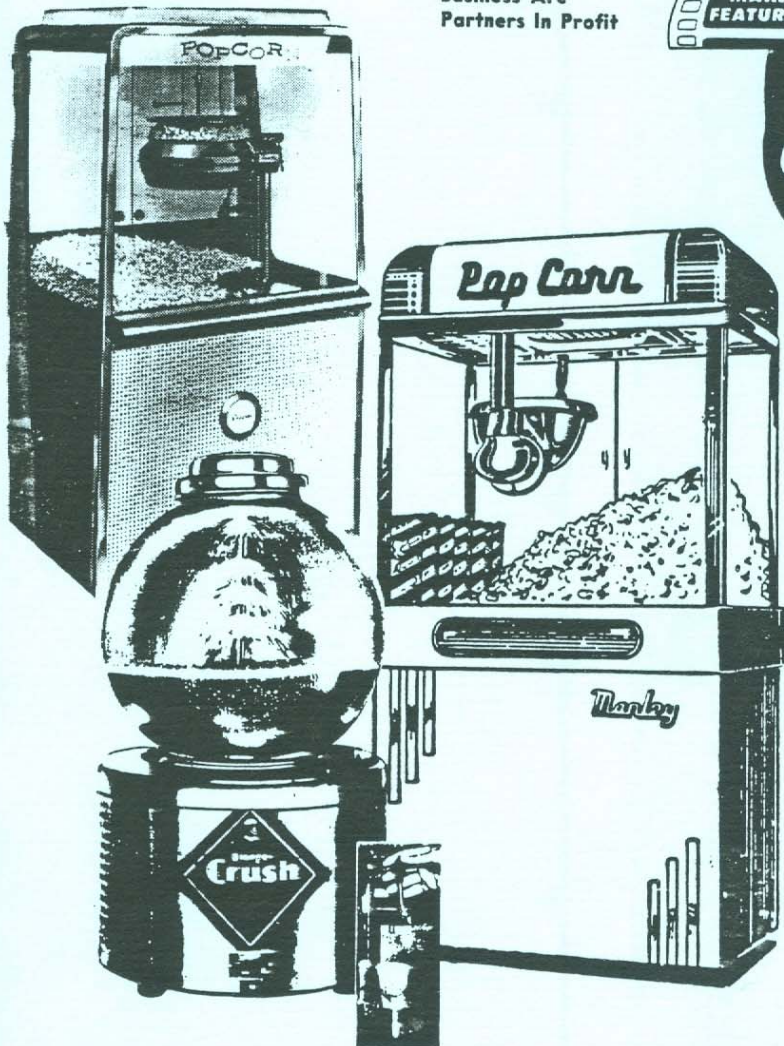
One reason people loved the movies was that they were very cheap at 5 cents a show. First introduced in Toronto in 1906, they caught on, ousting vaudeville completely in about 15 years. One of the first stars was Mary Pickford, a Toronto girl, who became the most popular star in the world of silent movies. Other Toronto names became famous almost overnight via the movies: Raymond Massey, Walter Huston and Beatrice Lilly.

One interesting notation beside the *Playtorium* in 1917 in the Toronto Directory is that the theatre showed "Ontario Board of Censors Moving Pictures". Censorship to assure that public morals are protected has therefore been in place for as long as movies have been shown in Ontario. The theatre chains themselves even carried on censorship, and in the attached advertisement in the Globe, Sept. 4, 1920 the Allen chain explained how it carefully controlled what the public could view. "Anything that might appeal to depraved tastes is strictly censored. Human, wholesome pictures are the eternal objective." Staff training and money-makers attached to the movie business are illustrated in the following training instructions.



Show Business And
The Refreshment
Business Are
Partners In Profit

SELL
Coca-Cola
for extra
profit



**INCORRECT HANDLING OF
FLASHLIGHT**

Here is a common fault the Nation over, which results in more annoyances in a single evening than our poor patron experiences in his office in a year, and he imagined he was coming to the theatre for an evening of entertainment and relaxation. His eyes were on the screen far less than they were distracted to the glare of the usher's flashlight, not only in his aisle, but across the entire floor.

Instead of being a helpful medium, the flashlight here is a menace, a distraction.

It is being held improperly, because this man is using his thumb to press the button. The more he extends his arm the greater the angle, and the sharper the glare.

The patrons who are being trailed receive little benefit from the rays of the light, and the entire audience is annoyed throughout the performance.



THE LAST PLAYTER



Albert E. Playter (1859-1941) was the last Playter to be associated with this property. When Albert died, there was a long obituary in the daily papers. They mentioned his UEL origins and his influence in the development of the west Danforth. Playter Boulevard and Crescent were named for the family. In his later years Albert moved to Barrie, living on his farm there. He did not slip into the golden years of retirement, however, but busied himself with another endeavour associated with recreation. Just before his death he opened a summer resort near Innisfil, calling it *Playter Harbour*. The Playters liked to name their projects in such a manner that little doubt was left as to who was behind them. At the time of his death he left his widow and 2 daughters. He was buried in St. James' Cemetery.

Meanwhile, before Albert left the Danforth, the *Playtorium* ceased to function as a movie theatre. In 1925 - 26 the building was vacant. In 1927 Albert had a new idea for "amusements", converting the building into the *Danforth Bowling and Recreation Club*. The old theatre just had not been large enough to attract the crowds, when competition from newer theatres was springing up all along the Danforth. Bowling proved to be a winner; *George White Bowling* occupied number 124-6 in 1931, but by 1937 *Danforth Bowling* was once again in residence and remained so until 1979.

Henrietta, Albert Playter's widow, inherited the building and property keeping them until 1955. She sold to Edward & Mabel Ashby for \$25 000. The Ashbys sold in 1959 to Nicholas Bulucon and Kathleen, his wife.

This sale was right on schedule reflecting the population changes which occurred in the late 1950's in the Danforth area. The offspring of the first wave of British immigrants were moving to the suburbs, away from the old neighbourhood. The owners of businesses which had been traditionally Anglo-Saxon, now sold out to Italians and Greeks, the new immigrants. This brought a cosmopolitan flavour to the Danforth. It led finally to a break with the voting tradition of the area which had voted Conservative since Confederation ! In 1962 the riding went to the NDP.

MODERN TIMES



he big change in accessibility in the first half of the twentieth century was without doubt the construction of the viaduct and the development of motor-cars. The second half produced an equally exciting transportation link with the City. The By-Law was passed in 1959 to acquire "certain lands for and in connection with an extension to the Rapid Transit System of the Toronto Transit Commission." Part of Lot 12 was appropriated at the time. The subway was opened in 1966. Business along the Danforth was to get another shot in the arm. With one of the highest commercial densities in the City, where merchants sell every product imaginable from automobiles to zithers, shopping convenience for customers was essential.

Nicholas Bulucon mortgaged the property heavily, until in 1974 he sold it to **Andreas & Panagiotis Dimakopoulos**. They, in turn, also arranged several mortgages. The Dimakopoulos family opened a Greek restaurant on the premises at 124, naming it *The Hellenic Place*. Another reference in the Toronto Directory mentions Peter Dimakopoulos living at 122, and Andy as the manager of *The Hellenic Place*. Other members of this family ran the Ella Restaurant. Marjorie Harris, writing in Toronto: The City of Neighbourhoods, pub. 1984, notes that "*there is an underlying Hellenic flavour as you cross the Prince Edward Viaduct.*" Indeed, the first sign you saw in the early 80's !

And yet.....the area is changing once again. As the immigrants' children grew up, they left for new homes in the suburbs, seeming status symbols of having achieved success beyond the level of their parents. Now a group of new Anglo-Saxons is discovering the Danforth with its comfortable and charming older homes and established shopping. They like the convenience of the subway, the proximity of the valley parks and the colorful ethnic mixture of Danforth Avenue.

PANAMA JOE'S



he owner of *Panama Joe's*, who bought the restaurant in 1984 as a numbered Ontario Company (J99239), belongs to this new wave of Anglo Saxons. **Derek Bryant**, an Englishman, travelled and explored many parts of the world, notably Southeast Asia, Australia and the hinterlands of South America, before establishing himself in the restaurant business at Broadview and Danforth. His associate, Christine Allen, is also of British descent, though born in Canada. She, too, travelled widely in Europe and Africa before coming to this corner of the world. Together they have created a very different kind of restaurant, featuring Indonesian foods. The ambiance is definitely South Pacific, but the dance floor of the long, narrow building is the resurrected bowling alley put in by Albert Playter, the wood grains restored and still showing clearly after all these years. The restaurant caters to a fun-loving crowd for meals, drinks, dancing and television at the long bar, providing an "amusement" spot in the tradition of the old building.

This document prepared by

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HISTORY UNLIMITED

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