

Hamlet of Glen Lawson



THE STONE HOUSE, GLEN LAWSON
Built about 1856

The hamlet of Glen Lawson was located approximately 2.5 kilometres southeast of Acton in the former Township of Esquesing. The settlement appears to have been named after Graham Lawson, who owned a large tract of land in lot 25, concession 4, Esquesing. On October 5th, 1836 the Crown grant of land was given on this site.

A log schoolhouse was opened in 1842 with John Newton as the teacher. The families which supported the school were the Burns, Scott, McTavish, Dempster, Lawson, Lamond, McBean, Stalker and Mathieson. The

schoolhouse was moved to lot 22, concession 2 in 1855 and was designated School Section #8.

John Scott purchased 100 acres in concession 4, lot 24 on February 30th 1852. On February 12th 1853 he sold five acres to the Toronto and Guelph Railway which later was known as the Canadian National Railway. It was believed the stone house which still stands today was erected around that time. The railway opened for business in 1856.

The proximity to the rail line and the Black Creek flowing through the glen attracted entrepreneurs. In 1856, J.B. Robinson ran the grist mill. On July 4th, 1875 John Scott and his wife granted to George and Edward Tolton, brothers, $\frac{3}{8}$ acre for \$19.00. On this land was the grist mill where the Toltons ground grain from miles around. The mill was driven by water brought down a mill race from a nine acre pond on the west side of the CNR tracks. From the mill race the water went under the 3rd line to a trough that ran the large overshot wheel. The grain was ground by a large millstone in the building. The Toltons operated the flour mill and the grain business in partnership under the firm name G & E Tolton.

In 1876 George Tolton was Vice President of the Esquesing Agricultural Society. He suffered a personal tragedy on the 19th of February, 1876 when his son Andrew died at the age of one year and nine months. In the advertisement dated January 24th 1877 the Toltons "proposed doing a strictly cash business hereafter. All flour and feed must be paid on delivery or at least within one month. All accounts due must be paid before the 10th of February next."

Other indications of business being conducted in this valley include an advertisement in the Acton Free Press which read, "About a half bag of wheat was lost on Tuesday between the 4th

line and Tolton Mills. The owner's name is on the bag. The finder will please return it to G.A. McDonald, lot 30. 4th line, Esquesing, dated March 28th, 1877."

A month later another advertisement entitled **Glen Lawson Mills** indicated further investment in the property. "Having thoroughly repaired our mill and put in a new Middlings Purifier we are now prepared to give a better yield of flour than formerly with quality as good. Gristing and chopping promptly attended to. The patronage of the public respectfully solicited. The highest price always paid for any quantity of wheat. A quantity of seed barley for sale." Middlings are coarse particles of ground wheat mixed with bran. At the time flour was \$1.00 a bushel and barley \$.50 a bushel.



The hamlet prospered with three houses, three barns and a grist mill. But disaster struck in 1882. The Acton Free Press on May 18th 1882 revealed that George Tolton, whose mill was destroyed by fire would erect a flour mill at the the Grand Trunk Railway depot in Acton. It would have a daily capacity of 100 barrels of new processed flour and a grain warehouse. Tolton left Glen Lawson and convincing Acton Council to loan him a reasonable sum at a fair rate of interest. Having rebuilt their business in Acton , George and Edward Tolton sold the grain business to James Matthews, an Acton

businessman and postmaster. In an advertisement dated October 25th 1882, Matthews promised to pay the highest price for all kinds of grain delivered to his warehouse at the Grand Trunk Railway, Acton.

The three story stone mill at Glen Lawson was rebuilt sometime later for use as a light leather tannery. On January 30th 1894 Herbert Thomas Arnold, an Acton glove manufacturer paid \$800 for the building and the land. The tannery had three vats and unlike the grist mill, small water wheel which was horizontal. Lured by the magic of electricity, Arnold opened a Georgetown glove factory in 1901. He maintained the Glen Lawson tannery until November 11th 1910. The property which also included a house and barn was sold to the Toronto Lime Company for \$925. The machinery from the tannery was moved to Georgetown.

The Toronto Lime Company started in 1872 and established the hamlet of Dolly Varden on Lot 24 along the rail line between the third and fourth concession. There were eventually about ten workers' homes in the hamlet. The lime kilns operated until 1931. Acton Limestone quarries bought the property in 1962 and a very successful quarry continues to operate as United Aggregates.

Graham Lawson sold his 65 acre farm on April 12th 1900 to Robert Stevenson Sprowl for \$2 410. It included the stone house in Glen Lawson and the two barns. In 1913 Robert Sprowl tore one barn down and used the beams and materials to build a new barn on his other 100 acres of Lot 26 concession four.

On January 15th Robert Sprowl granted 0.67 acre of land to the Toronto Suburban Railway which ran along the south edge of Glen Lawson parallel to the Grand Trunk Railway.

James Plant, whose family came from County Wicklow, Ireland, was born in 1861 and died in 1944 at the age of 83. He lived in Glen Lawson over 50 years, first in the house behind the grist mill and about 25 years in the Lawson stone house. In 1913 he worked for the Toronto Lime Company at Dolly Varden. In the last years of his life he worked in the harness leather department at the Beardmore Tannery until he retired at the time of his wife's death in 1932. His last years at the tannery were during the depression and he was paid \$1 a day, \$5 a week.

The stone house at Glen Lawson was rented from Robert Sprowl and later his son John Sprowl. Plant paid \$4 a month rent. When he retired John Sprowl reduced his rent to \$2 a month.

In 1944 Gordon and Marion Follet, his parents and other members of the Follet family came to Glen Lawson remaining there until 1960.

In March 1946 Glen Lawson was completely flooded when the Beardmore Tannery thirty foot high dam broke releasing a thirty acre filter bed pond. Twenty-five million gallons of red water completely washed out the Third Line bridge and undermined the CN Railway bridge at lot 25. The water rushing through the railway culvert was half way up, almost ten feet deep and the hamlet was covered with fifteen feet of water.

Today there are only two houses left in the Hamlet of Glen Lawson. The original stone house, built around 1856 was sold by John Sprowl in September 1951 for \$3 700 and has been several times since for over \$100 000

Even this quiet corner of Esquesing Township has had a bustling history, yet a visit to the hamlet today will recall a Scottish glen surrounded by round bald hills, much as the first settlers would have enjoyed.