



The Historic Village of Terra Cotta

Salmon! At spawning time one could fairly walk across the Credit here on the backs of spawning Atlantic Salmon. So said the pioneers in this area of Esquesing and Chingacousy Townships. But as the wilderness was tamed, the salmon eventually disappeared.

History first records this area under the name of Tucker's Mill. Henry Tucker purchased 40 acres of the East half of Lot 27, Concession 6 West in 1855 for 800 dollars. He hired a surveyor to lay out 18 village lots. Tucker sold his prosperous holdings in 1859 to Simon Plewes, a Yorkshire miller who had run the mill at Acton with his father and brother from 1850. In 1863, he married Janet Smith, an Esquesing girl. Together they had six children. Unfortunately, Simon drowned in his mill race in 1876 at the age of 45.

The future of Plewes' Mills seemed certain in 1863 when the Wesleyan Methodists opened their church here, putting it on the Georgetown circuit. Before that the nearest church was Union Presbyterian on lot 23, Esquesing. The first log church was built in 1835. The present stately stone church was erected in 1883 with stone from

Townsend's quarry.



In 1866, the post office opened with the name, Salmonville. William Watkins was the first postmaster, moving to Glen Williams the following year. A general store and post office have served the village from at least this time. James Carol was postmaster in 1871 and still held the post in 1891 when the name was changed to Terra Cotta. He was followed by Jane Smith in 1894. She built a new

store in 1899, which still serves the village today.

A good education was important to the pioneering families in this area, and school sections were established in 1842. The Chinguacousy Township School Section #3 served this corner of Peel County, while Esquesing Township School Section #15 or

Clay Hill School served the Halton County youngsters. SS#3 was located on the 5th Line West at 22 Sideroad. It closed in 1960 and is a private home today. Creditview Public School on Mississauga Road opened in 1964. Clay Hill School was at Lot 29 on the 10th Line Esquesing. It closed about 1959 and later burned down.

An important step for Terra Cotta was the building of the Hamilton and North Western Railway just north of the village in 1877. The railway helped with the movement of limestone and sandstone which was quarried in this area from the 1850's. The Townsend family in particular were the principal quarries in the 19th century. Quarries flourished on the 5th and 6th Lines in Chinguacousy and also on the 9th and 10th Lines in Esquesing. Credit Valley stone became known for the quality all across the country. The Village was doing a steady business in stone by the turn of the century. The quarries of Jack Murray (successor of the Townsends) installed an incline railway up the escarpment in 1904. J. L. Dolson opened a new quarry the previous year.

While the stone of the escarpment was quarried above the village, the very shale on which it sat attracted the brick making business in 1906. The Terra Cotta Pressed Brick Co. commenced operations on a large scale. An electric power house was erected where Mr. Plewes' grist mill stood and the power was transmitted to the brick plant near the train station. This provided a large number of jobs. In 1911, Elijah Townsend sold land to William Flavelle and Robert Kennedy to form the Halton Brick Company. A third brick factory was opened on 27th Sideroad, Esquesing in 1914 by L. Plant. All three plants boomed until the Depression of 1929 began. They were closed and eventually dismantled.

Fire destroyed the CNR train station in 1956, marking the end of the industrial age of Terra Cotta. It was this lack of industry, which started the next period of growth for Terra Cotta.

The tourists focus began in 1944 when Toronto artist Jordanus Vander Vliet purchased land for a home and art studio where he started classes, attracting artists from across the province. John Agg succeeded him and in 1959 Rebecca Sisler renovated the former blacksmith shop into the Forge studio.

Summer cottages led Rod Clancy to lay out a summer park which eventually became the Terra Cotta Conservation Area in 1958. This very successful attraction is run by the Credit Valley Conservation Authority.

Betty and Harry Farrar purchased a riverside property in 1951 and created the Terra Cotta Inn. A hotel had once operated on the same site. This business alone soon attracted many tourists to the Village. A 1975 fire did not stop the Inn for long as they rebuilt and expanded. The 1989 recession also closed the business down, reopening in 1994.

The Region of Peel purchased the Forge in 1969 to straighten the road. The local opposition was most vocal! The charm of the Village was preserved. The historic Forge is now available for art shows from the Region of Peel.

Peel Region also recognised the Terra Cotta Community Hall as an historic site in 1992. The former Methodist Church was maintained by Trustees with the help of the Thursday Thimble Club from 1949. This club has also helped with street lighting, welcome signs and funds for the Georgetown Hospital.

Documenting this history and the changes to the Village have been the Terra Cotta Women's Institute, formed in 1931. They also helped the Terra Cotta Farmer's Club (1913-1976) to buy the former SS#3 as a hall in 1961. It was sold and renovated into a home in 1971.

The blessings of nature have always stood Terra Cotta in good stead. The abundant salmon, the thick limestone deposits, the rich deep clay, the winding river with bountiful flora and fauna have provided a living for many through the years. Today the salmon return, being reintroduced in 1988. The story of this verdant valley is far from over!

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