

# The Historic Town of Acton

For almost 150 years this place has been called Acton. It was 1844 when Robert Swan, our first postmaster, suggested this name to replace "Adamsville" (chosen in honour of the founders) and the original name, "Dansville". Acton was settled in 1825 by the Rev. Ezra, Rev. Zenas, and Rufus Adams. Saddlebag Methodist preachers, they retired to farm and rebuilt their strength, returning to the circuit in 1830. Zenas preached the first sermon ever delivered in the locality, just east of Acton, opposite Worden's farm. Zenas held services at his home on the corner of Main and Church Streets. Built of yellow pine about 1830, his home still stands. Zenas died in 1847.

Ezra, whose home stood near Bower Avenue later moved to Drayton. Rufus' wife opened the Acton School in 1826 where the Knox Church now stands. The school also doubled as a Methodist Chapel. Rufus died in 1856 and his widow soon moved to Dundas. A fourth brother, Eliphalet Adams later joined his brothers here. His son Phineas who died at age 31 in 1830 may have been the first grave behind the Chapel (Pioneer Cemetery - now behind Knox Church). Eliphalet, who died in 1844 had a younger son, Ransom, who was a bachelor businessman here until his death in 1880. He was the last Adams to reside in Acton.

The Adams brothers dammed up the creek to create the Mill pond which powered their saw mill and later the flour mill which operates on the same site today. The mill pond, named "Fairy Lake" by Sarah Secord, surrounds Prospect Park. The 14 acres have served as the town park and fairgrounds since the village purchased it in 1889 for \$3000. The stone pillars were erected in 1924 to celebrate 50 years of incorporation. The arena was erected in 1929 on the site of the army drill shed. The 1867 barn stands beside the arena and serves the Acton Agricultural Society as a Poultry barn at fair times



Main street was Acton's principal thoroughfare in the early days. The Adams family laid out the streets in a grid pattern, naming them after family members. Then the boom began with the coming of the railroad. The first Grand Trunk train steamed through town in 1856. The Toronto-to-Guelph Road (Highway 7) also served as a main road. It was laid out in 1827. Main Street became Highway 25 as the automobile

became king, causing passenger rail service to decline until November 1967 when Acton Station was closed. Limited service was reintroduced in 1987 although the station has long since been pulled down.

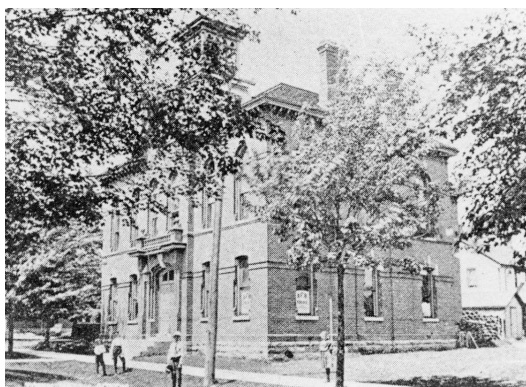
Acton adopted the theme of "Leathertown" in recent years and with good reason. The tanning industry began in 1842 under Abraham Nelles. By 1865, the Beardmore Tanning Company, a Hamilton tanner since 1844, purchased the business and became an integral part of the village. They built employee housing, tennis courts, a bowling green, a golf course, boathouse, ran a co-operative store, and the village outdoor arena on Frederick Street. At one time the tannery proclaimed itself as the largest in the British Empire. Canada Packers purchased it in 1944, operating under the Beardmore name until they closed it on Sept. 12, 1986.



Acton supported many industries related to leather, particularly the W. H. Storey glove factory on Bower Avenue. Begun in 1868, Storey employed up to 250 people. He built his family a magnificent home on the corner of Mill and John Streets in 1879. The Storey family left the house at the end of World War 1 when Wilfred Coles ran it as a veterans' home. It was a hotel until 1937 when it became a funeral home. Storey's son sold the business in 1915 to H. T. Arnold of Georgetown who ran the glove business

until 1954. The four storey factory was razed in 1962 to accommodate the new Acton post office.

Other tanneries prepared leather for companies like Hewetson Shoe, Coronna Shoe, Superior Glove, Marzo Glove and Frank Heller and Co., which confirmed Acton's leather heritage. Heller and Dawkins were instrumental in starting the Olde Hide House, Acton's tourist attraction in one of Beardmore's warehouses erected in 1899. While leather was Acton's mainstay, other companies like the Acton Plow Co., Building Products, H. K. Porter (Disston Saws), A. P. Green, Ajax Eng., Blow Press, Microplastics, Force Electric, Mason Knitting, Dills Printing and Keates Organs have employed many.



Acton was part of Esquesing Township until 1874 when it was incorporated as a village. The Town Hall was erected in 1882 for the municipal council, the constabulary and the fire brigade. When Acton

became part of Halton Hills in 1974, the hall was no longer needed. Designated an historic building in 1977, it was eventually sold to Heritage Acton for one dollar. They are presently restoring the building which still includes the nineteenth century lockup. The other principal public buildings in Acton include its centennial projects: the Hydro offices, which were considerably enlarged in 1988-89 and the Public Library, whose park like setting includes a small arched bridge popular with photographers.

Pausing to read the historical marker at this site, it is worth noting that the small stream under the bridge was once responsible for supplying power to the mills of Acton, the very source of power that drew the Adams family to the site in the 1820s

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This document was written by John Mark Benbow Rowe for the

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