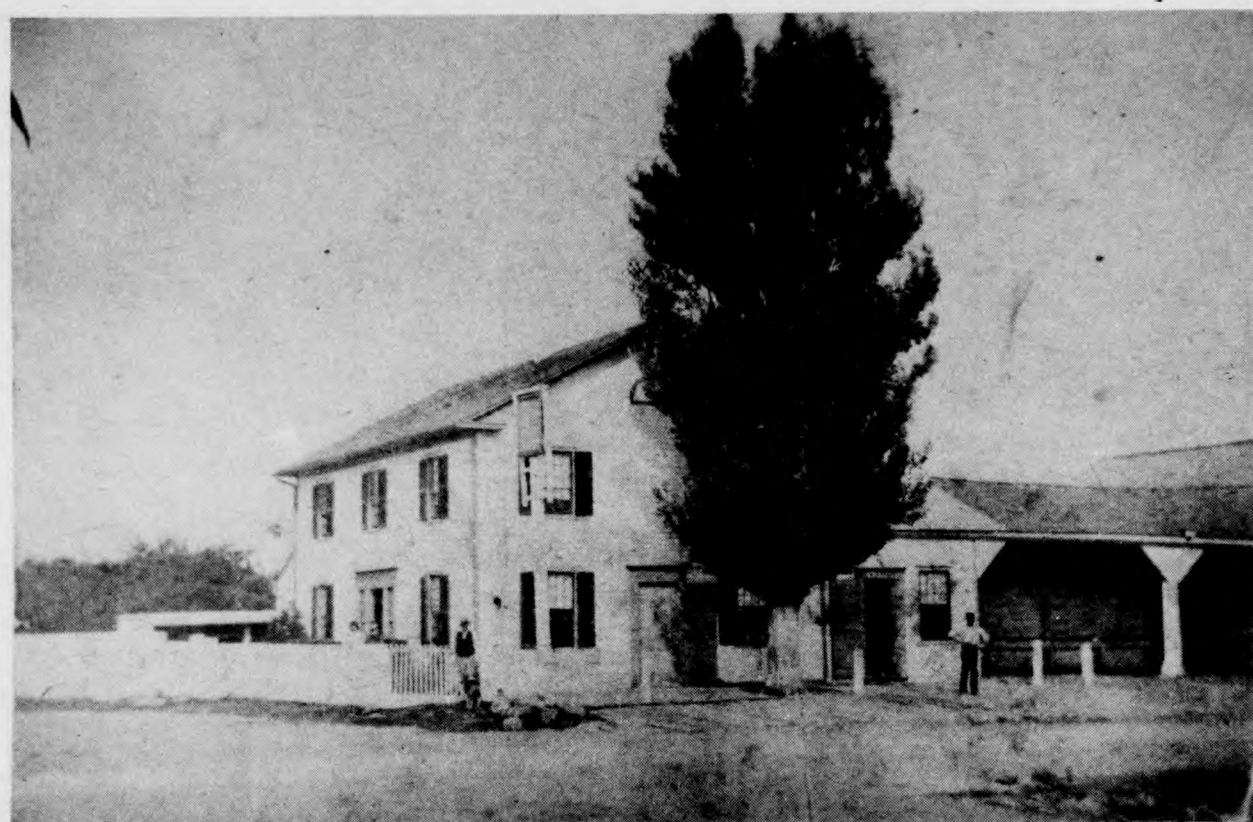


139 years for a York U pub



1860 The earliest known photograph of the Green Bush Inn, circa 1860. The stables and balsam tree (after which it was named) no longer exist. This photo will probably be the principle guide for reconstructing the Inn to its original state.



1910 The Green Bush Inn in its pre-prohibition and post-electricity days, probably around 1910. Previously known as Steeles Hotel (after proprietor Thomas Steele) and Poplar House, the inn is rich in history, rumoured to have been used as a meeting place during the fight for responsible government.



1969 The Green Bush Inn as it stands today, adjacent to Yonge-Steeles Motors parking lot. The building was scheduled to have been torn down this spring, but pending the results of an architectural survey it just might be put on a truck and moved on campus and used as the York Pub, naturally.

photo by Page Toles, Toronto

photo by Page Toles, Toronto

all other photos by historic David Cooper (Excalibur)

One day, while reading a book, "Pioneering in North York" by Patricia Hart, which he had bought for his father for Christmas, Excalibur's Dave Cooper came across a section on Inns and Taverns. Having a natural interest in the subject, he read it carefully. Near the end, he found a paragraph on the Green Bush Inn and the interesting fact that it was still standing. Hey, why not move it and . . .

. . . instant history . . .

by Anne Wright

It sounded terrific. Refurbish the original Steeles Tavern, move it on campus and convert it into the York Pub. Great! Instant history, warm atmosphere, a link with Pioneer Village, Canada and so forth. But easier said than done, or so thought the Excalibur-Y.S.C. Green Bush Committee back in the early days of January. The more it was investigated, the more totally infeasible the plan became. Great idea but . . .

And then at the recommendation of Mr. R.K. Cooper, Administrator of Black Creek Pioneer Village, it was decided to take the proposal to a professional, one of the people in the know. Napier Simpson, historical architect, vice chairman of the Toronto Historical Board, architectural consultant for all works at Black

Creek Pioneer Village, renovator of numerous buildings in Ontario including Chiefswood (Pauline Johnson's home) — he, if anyone, should be able to ascertain the feasibility of the project.

His reaction? "Terrific," he said "I've had my eye on that building for years hoping that someone would recognize it's historical value. And the fact that students are interested in preserving Canadiana is greatly encouraging."

During the next few days Simpson examined the Green Bush Inn — interior and exterior. All fears were soon dispelled. The results were most gratifying.

The building will be able to be moved in one piece, he reported. It's in remarkably good condition and has already been moved once. . . Steeles Avenue shouldn't pose many problems — very few overhead wires . . . once you get

the building on campus the procedure is pretty basic, dig a large hole, straddle the inn across it, and then build your foundations . . . next step is renovations for both the outside and inside — strip the plaster to the original wallpaper, scrape the woodtrim to the original pine, relocate the original central fireplace and stairway and so on.

Much use can be made of the research done for Halfway House, the tavern relocated at Pioneer Village. Oral traditions also play an important part — what previous tenants and visitors to the building recall about the interior could be vital for imagining the original layout and decor of the inn.

All of this of course is expressed in the layman's vernacular. Before any definite action can be initiated, a detailed and technical feasibility study must be conducted. This will naturally involve architect's fees. But fortune still smiles on the Green Bush Committee, for at last Tuesday's Y.S.C. meeting the committee investigating the pub idea received almost unanimous approval from the Y.S.C. to commission Simpson to undertake the study.

And now it's only a matter of weeks till the study will be completed. Then, armed with the necessary architectural diagrams, financial estimates and renovation proposals, the committee will present Simpson's report, a study of financial requirements, and research on the necessary legal status, to the university administration for final approval.

Meanwhile, here's to Canadiana. Here's to the Green Bush pub!

History of the Inn

reprinted from Pioneering in North York by Patricia Hart

"The original Green Bush Inn stood on the north-east corner of Steeles and Yonge Street in Markham Township. It was opened in 1830 by Joseph Abrahams, and a large balsam tree in front of the hotel gave it its name. One night the stables of this hotel were destroyed by fire, and eleven horses belonging to farmers from the north were killed while their masters slept in the house. Well water was all that was available to quench the fire, the river being too far away. Abrahams later moved with his painted sign-board, designed after the balsam tree, to the outskirts of York on Lot Street in Toronto and opened another hotel by the same name."

"John Morley, a Newtonbrook property owner, built a tavern on the north-west corner of Steeles Avenue and Yonge Street in Vaughan Township in 1847. This hotel was later called Steele's Hotel, Poplar House, and the Green Bush Inn with Thomas Steele as proprietor."

"John C. Steele, a joiner and son of Thomas, took over the hotel in 1877 and the traffic was so steady on Yonge Street that John's son, as a boy, pumped pails of water for the horses from early morning until sunset while the weary owners refreshed themselves at the bar."

Thomas Collins purchased and lived in the hotel in 1938 after moving it around the corner onto Steeles Avenue.

It still stands."

. . . with money and work and imagination . . .

by Pete Reeder

Snow is piled high about the old frame structure. Gray slats weave across the outside of the frame building; dried and warped, they give the building the appearance of having been built with rejected popsicle sticks.

In the front yard the whiteness of the snow is sprinkled with brown wood chips from the half dozen logs lying in disorder, waiting to be split by the axe already imbedded in one of them. It is a scene of sharp contrast to the modern garage and service station next door.

This is the Green Bush Inn, or what remains of it, the once proud establishment of innkeeper John Abrahams who built

it in 1830 on the corner of Yonge and Steeles. Today it is inhabited by a Hungarian gardener and landscaper.

We knock and soon the door is opened by a woman in her late thirties. We explain our interest in purchasing the building which is due to be torn down in the spring. It is the first time she has heard of it. She is quite willing to let us look the house over. It lost all semblance of being an inn a long, long time ago.

Entering, we find ourselves in a fair sized hall. The floor is plywood and dirty with mud dried to a powder. The walls are bare of paint or wall-paper. Just wall-board put up and left alone. The ceiling is yellowed and peeling, like an aged newspaper. Certainly it hasn't been changed

since the day it first sheltered a travelling preacher or perhaps a plow salesman. Stairs go up to the second floor which hold the old rooms once used by the preacher or salesman or even perhaps by the political dignitary of the area.

We have not explained to our host that our intentions are to investigate the possibilities of taking the old inn to our campus and turning it into a student pub. The job would require a good deal of cash and work. Our interest is strictly low key for now and we want it to stay so. But she asks nothing and we say nothing.

We note the number of rooms — a large hall, two large living rooms, a kitchen — all relatively

unimportant-looking.

Out in the hall again we mount the stairs to the second floor. A large bathroom complete with wooden lockers is to the right. It would make a perfect sauna bath. Besides the bathroom are four or five good sized rooms. Good sized for their day and still large by today's standards. All are bleak and our breath hangs on the air a bit; there is a coal stove in the only bedroom that seems to be used, but it is not running. On the wall is a black, large square covered with such pieces of artistic, literary genius as, "Kill Cops!!!" and "Have a Tommy" (?). On a table sit some empty bottles of booze. Maybe they know our reasons after all.

The low slung doorways of the

rooms reveal the age of the inn and several of the doors and windows still retain the original glass and wood. The second floor we realize could easily serve as the student centre till 1975 when the official one will be built — yes, it's been delayed again.

Below once more, we are shown the shed at the rear. An addition of fairly recent times.

We thank our hostess and say goodbye.

The present atmosphere is depressing. But with money and work and imagination the Green Bush could be given back its former character and vitality. On campus it would stand out against a background of concrete and brick. And, most importantly of all, it would be ours.

. . . enthusiastic approval . . .

by David H. Blain

Henry Best, Toronto born director of York's Student Services, has expressed enthusiastic approval for the joint Excalibur-YSC plan to relocate the Green Bush Inn on the York campus to serve as a pub.

He doesn't expect any overt opposition from the university administration. "The president, I think, is perfectly aware of the fact that there is a project afoot and . . . hasn't made any indication that this should not continue."

Best supports careful market and feasibility studies of the "Green Bush" project to see who would use the facilities and what services could be hooked up with the house before approaching the President. Once this is accomplished he says, "I would be very surprised if agreement were not forthcoming."

A devoted student of Canadian history, Best lives today in a

hundred year old stone house on a farm in the outskirts of Toronto.

While working in Ottawa for Sidney Smith, (at that time the Minister for External Affairs), Best used to frequently drive down to Upper Canada Village while in its early stages of excavation and reconstruction.

During each of the past three winters he and his wife have spent a weekend in the Village carefully examining several of the old structures and their contents.

Speaking on the dilapidated condition of the Green Bush Inn Best said: "One mustn't be discouraged by the apparent ramshackle outfit of small outbuildings and the fact that even some of the clapboarding is loose or rotten. He seemed extremely optimistic that someone of Napier Simpson's calibre will be able to diagnose the ills of the

building and restore it to its previous grandeur.

"I tend to feel that the contrast in architecture provided by such buildings as Passey House, Stong House and the Green Bush Inn can only enhance the overall appearance of the campus," he says.

Best feels that the choice of a separate structure housing the pub is most wise since people will be able to drop in from all over campus — "It will not be a college function in that sense."

Because of the provincial grant aspect of university financing and priorities in construction Best strongly doubts that the university will contribute to the restoration of the old pub.

He sees long term financing from outside sources as being the most likely but he doesn't see the pub paying for itself until it has been in operation in excess of one year.



"And so they decided to take their idea for renovating the Green Bush Inn to 'the people in the know'. Left to right: architect Napier Simpson, Green Bush Committee members Pete Reeder, David Blain, Anne Wright and architect John Irwin.



Historical architect Napier Simpson thinks the Green Bush-York Pub venture to be a great idea — and entirely feasible. As for the rest of the architecture on campus, well . . . "vines are the only hope for York" he says.