

Community

Clarkson

*It's the
future
and the
past*

By JOHN STEWART
Times staff writer

On Clarkson Road North just above Lakeshore Road there's a winding driveway leading to a little bit of Clarkson's history.

The lane goes back to 1056 Clarkson Rd. North, which is the oldest inhabited home in Peel. It's where Warren Clarkson, for whom the community is named, built his homestead in 1819. The house is still much as it was then.

On the front of the property is a sign which explains that the property may be developed for, "single family residential, semi-detached residential, street townhouses and greenbelt."

The symbolic juxtaposition of Clarkson's rural past, and its suburban future, is very appropriate.

Marjorie Cavan, now 80 years old, has been living at the other end of Clarkson Road North since 1920. She and her husband owned 30 acres which stretched from what is now the QEW south to Spring Creek Cemetery, where most of the early Clarkson pioneers are buried.

When the Cavans first moved in, Clarkson was a dirt road and there were only about 10 families in the vicinity. Their abundant orchards produced apples, pears, and cherries among other things.

The Cavans, whose son now runs Cavan's Fruit Market and Garden Centre, sold the two farms they owned in the area. "The farms were both turned into homes," says Mrs. Cavan. "My husband got ill and we wondered, 'what's the use of killing ourselves.' It seems a shame that all of the farmland has been bought up, but with trouble getting help, what can you do? My husband was in poor health and we saw a chance to sell. We'd worked that land a long time."

To Mrs. Cavan it seems, "we've got a lot of strangers here now. It's all changing with the times and there's nothing you can do about it."

There are still many who remember the old times.

Mrs. David Terry has lived on Clarkson Road for 58 years. "This whole area used to be full of fruit and vegetable farmers," she recalls. The strawberries were particularly renowned. In 1915, a sign erected on Warren Clarkson's railway station, along what is now the CNR tracks, declared proudly that more strawberries passed through that station than through any other in Ontario.

"It's too bad that this light, sandy soil had to be all used for homes."

But there are other comforts, she points out. "The availability of all the things we have here now is really something," she says. "We have malls, and the GO trains and



MORRIS LAMONT/THE TIMES

When the Webbs moved to Canada they looked for something 'like a New England town.'

bus service and the seniors are really treated very well. We're being pampered."

Also living on Clarkson Road, in a log cabin, is Mrs. A.L. Sayers, who has spent most of her 90 years in the area.

The history of Clarkson is abundant for those who seek out its past.

On the east side of Clarkson Road is Benares, originally built by Captain James Harris who served as magistrate in the area. Protected by the Ontario Heritage Foundation, furniture in the historic home dates from about 1870.

Mazo de la Roche wrote her fictional Whiteoaks of Jaina series from her nearby cottage in Birchwood and used Benares as the imaginative model home for her characters.

Bradley House, now located at Meadow Wood and Orr Roads, was built in 1835 by William Bradley. The Lewis Bradley museum, which is open to the public, was named after William's father, a United Empire Loyalist who came to Clarkson around 1820.

Behind the Bradley Museum is the Anchorage, the home of retired naval Captain Skynner, which is being refurbished by

the Mississauga Historical Foundation.

A private home on Clarkson Road South used to be Coach's Inn, the favorite watering hole for those travelling by horse from Hamilton to Toronto.

In Spring Creek Cemetery the names of those who built the community are evident. The earliest headstone dates from 1812.

But history is not the main appeal to new families moving into the area.

When Maurice and Diana Webb and their two daughters moved from Paxton, Mass. (population 4,000) to Canada in 1979, they started looking for something that would be "like a small New England town." They began their search in Oakville but ended up buying a home on Green Glade in Clarkson.

"We liked it basically because of the trees and the settled look," says Diana Webb. "It was a more established neighborhood."

The Webbs bought right beside a school, something that would be unheard of where they used to live in the U.S.

"We're close to the school. We're close to the water. We walk over into Rattray Marsh all the time and we even wander down to Bradley House once in a while," says Mrs. Webb. Like almost everyone else in the city,

the Webbs look to Toronto for their entertainment.

It wasn't easy to make the move from a small town to a big city, but living in Clarkson has made it easier.

Jim and Margaret Ferenbach have moved often over the years from Montreal to Mississauga to Montreal to Calgary and back to Mississauga. From 1972 to 1974 they lived on Perseden Road in Clarkson. When they were moved back to this area, they bought a home two blocks away on Sunningdale Bend.

"We have a ravine lot on Sheridan Creek," says Mrs. Ferenbach. "It has a lot of attractions because of the convenience to shopping, the lake, the GO train. You're close to most things but you feel like you're living in the country at the same time."

Like most people, Mrs. Ferenbach had difficulty expressing the special attraction of Clarkson. "Since we came back here a second time, I guess you could say that's proof enough for us."

Whether they came for expedience or for aesthetics, for the new reasons or the old, Clarkson residents continue to find their community a special place in which to live.