SCUGOG’S LOST TREASUERS

featuring Seven Mile Island

By J. Peter Hvidsten
Scugog’s Lost Treasures

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Scugog’s Estate Properties

During the early part of the 20th century, two Scugog Township properties bordering on the shores of Lake Scugog were developed into magnificent estates, complete with walkways meandering through colourful floral gardens which were adorned with statues, arbors and reflecting pools.

The largest, and most magnificent of these estates was located just off the west shore of Scugog Island on an isolated 26 acre piece of land originally known Nonquon Island. This property later became known as Seven Mile Island and became the summer estate home of Alex Ross and Mary Wilson during the 1920s and 1930s.

Another, equally impressive estate was originally known by the name Beechenhurst when owned by Dr. J.H. Sangster in the late 1800s. The estate was later renamed Beechcroft. After being purchased by Frederick and Ethel Kent, the popular garden paradise became known as Kent Estates during their ownership from about 1920 to 1940.
Acknowledgements

Due to the popularity of our recent publication, Historic Homes & Estates of Port Perry, this condensed version of the book has been published. Scugog's Lost Treasures features excerpts for Historic Homes & Estates, including chapters featuring the magnificent private estates of Seven Miles Island, Kent Estates and a number of exceptional homes which were lost to fire.

We were most fortunate in writing about the Historic Homes and Estates of Scugog Township to have had the co-operation of many people who provided valuable information and pictures for this book.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to everyone, who contributed in any way, to the material you will find in this book. Without the willing help of many people it would not have been possible.

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We thank you one and all...

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Seven Mile Island

One of the most magnificent properties to have ever been developed in Scugog Township is Seven Mile Island. This relatively isolated piece of land, found attached to Scugog Island by a narrow causeway, has been home to a number of wealthy residents over the past 100 years. Seven Mile Island, as it is known today, was originally several packages of land, which over the years was assembled into a 91 acre parcel.

Records dating back to the early 1880s show Albert C. Stevens as owner of the land, which at that time was referred to as Nonquon Island. Mr. Stevens operated the property as a sportsman’s home, providing comfortable accommodation for hunters and fishermen, many whom travelled from parts of Canada and the U.S.A., to enjoy the tremendous fishing and shooting available on and around Lake Scugog. While Mr. Stevens and his wife provided adequate facilities for their guests, the property paled in comparison to what it would become through much of the next century.

From the mid 1890s until 1919 the property changed hands a number of times. Some of the owners during this period include: Harry Beasley (1902-09), Silas E. VanCamp (1910), George Cotton (1911) and Thomas Stinzel (1912-19).

Thomas Stinzel lived in the original log cabin on the property before beginning construction of a large new house which he named Delmont Cottage, the same name the old log house had been called.

A news item in an October 1912 issue of the Port Perry Star reported that Seven Mile Island Hotel was a popular spot for hunters, indicating that Mr. Stinzel rented out rooms to duck hunters during the fall. Another report in 1916 suggests that the Island was a popular spot for excursions, where par-
ticipants could enjoy swimming, boating and picnics in front of the hotel.

While Seven Mile Island was under the ownership of Mr. Stinzel, he also developed a registered plan of subdivision for 19 lots along the north-west shore of Lake Scugog.

On May 2, 1919, Alex Ross Wilson and his wife Mary purchased Seven Mile Island from Thomas Stinzel and began to develop the property into what would become a magnificent estate. Mr. Wilson amassed his wealth as owner of his father’s company, Andrew Wilson & Co., which manufactured the very popular “Bachelor” brand cigars. In 1923 the business was taken over by the Imperial Tobacco Co. Ltd., although Mr. Wilson continued as its president until 1929.

After leaving the tobacco company, Mr. Wilson became vice-president of Consolidated Press Limited of Toronto, publishers of Saturday Night, The Canadian Home Journal and the Farmer’s Magazine.

Over the next few years they assembled a number of small parcels of

The new Delmont Cottage during construction by Albert C. Stinzel about 1914, with an unidentified group of people on the porch.

Children sitting in front of Delmont Cottage at Seven Mile Island.
land abutting the area, until they had accumulated approximately 91 acres. It was during the Wilson's ownership of the Seven Mile Island that this relatively undeveloped land, was turned into an estate showplace.

The Wilsons immediately started work on enlarging Delmont Cottage, adding a number of buildings to the property, constructing numerous floral gardens, a swimming pool, tea house, reflecting pool and an elaborate boathouse with a dance hall on the upper level. The property boasted beautifully manicured lawns, rose gardens, bridges, ponds and an elaborate pergola leading to the magnificent 26 room mansion.

Mr. Wilson hired talented Scottish stonemasons to erect huge stone pillars, the shape of cigars, at the entrance to the property and also construct stone fences and walkways throughout the property. The craftsmen came to the estate to do this work after completing the construction of Casa Loma in Toronto.

While residents of Seven Mile Island, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson became quite involved within the community. They were known for their generosity, purchasing new uniforms for the Port Perry Band on one occasion, and donating $1,000 towards cleaning up Lake Scugog on another.

Occasionally, the Wilsons would open their property to the community for garden parties. On one of these occasions in August 1927 Port Perry Star publisher Samuel Farmer described the event as follows:

"A Gala day on Scugog as Mr. and Mrs. A.R. Wilson opened the grounds of Seven Mile Island for a garden party which the whole community attended."

"We can't think of it, without a feeling of shame, for the way in which the crowd acted was more like hungry refugees than guests."

Mr. Wilson was 71 years old when he died at his home at 5 Beaumont Rd., in the Rosedale district of Toronto, on October 12, 1941, after an illness of about two months. He was survived by his wife Mary, a step-daughter Mrs. Roy McConnell, and a nephew, R.A. Wilson.

Following the death of her husband, Mrs. Wilson lost interest in the estate and about two years later, on September 4, 1943, she sold Seven Mile Island for a mere $18,000 to Harry S. Ely and his
This view of Seven Mile Island looking east from Lake Scugog during the winter of 1929 shows the Wilson residence, and the elaborate fence, left, which enclosed the swimming pool. The water tower can be seen at far left of photo.

The beautiful white lattice arbour, surrounded by hundreds of brilliant flowers and shrubs, led to a large water fountain which was located in front of the 28 room main residence of the Wilsons.
Mary Wilson relaxes beside the reflecting pool. This view of the pool, from the opposite end of the top photo, shows the stone tea house and some of the stone pillars and fences surrounding the pool.
Looking across the swimming pool towards the Wilson’s residence.

The beautiful inground swimming pool, surrounded by an ornate fence and two changerooms.
SCUGOG'S LOST TREASURES

This elevated picture, taken about 1930 shows the south end of Seven Mile Island with Lake Scugog and part of Scugog Island in the background.

A view of the main residence taken near the fountain in the floral gardens just east of the house.
Looking north along the shoreline of Lake Scugog. The picture shows the expansive manicured lawns, and the ornate fence which surrounds the swimming pool in the background.

A large stone fountain, featuring dozens of small sculptures. The pergola which leads from the main residence and floral gardens to the roadway, can be seen in the background.
wife Freda. Mr. Ely was one of a group of four men who joined forces to purchase the property but before the deal closed, his three partners backed out, leaving Mr. Ely to arrange financing for the purchase on his own.

Harry Ely was the owner of "VanKirk Chocolate Corporation," a chocolate manufacturing company located at 301 King St., Toronto. The company made chocolates and chocolate bars for a variety of stores, including Loblaws, Dominion and Eatons, and also provided chocolate bars under the "VanKirk" name for movie theaters. He was probably most famous for developing a baking product under the brand name "Chipits."

Harry Ely passed away when he was only 41-year-old, but the firm continued under the management of his wife, and later with the help of Freda’s second husband, Henry L. (Harry) Fogler.

The VanKirk company was sold to an American firm, and was later purchased by the Hershey Co. "Chipits" are still produced by Hershey today, using the same logo designed by Harry Ely more than 60 years ago.

Mrs. Freda (Ely) Fogler, now more than 93 years of age, remembers when they purchased Seven Mile Island from Mary Wilson, it was in a state of disrepair and neglect. "The lawns looked..."
When the Elys purchased the Wilson Estate in 1943, the property was overgrown and in a state of disrepair. The main residence was converted into apartments for friends and family to stay during the summer.

The pictures on this page were all taken in 1943 before the Elys purchased the property. The large water fountain found in front of the main residence was often used as a wading pool by the children. The beautiful arbor, as it looked about 1948. At the far end is the water fountain in front of the house.
“like hay fields,” she said, and remembered working “like fiends” to cut down the waist high grass and clean up the property.

While owner of Seven Mile Island, Harry Ely also purchased two farms adjacent to the island estate, but outside the main gates on the mainland of Scugog Island.

Mrs. Fogler recalled that the family was not initially received with open arms in the community, speculating it may have had something to do with them being Jewish. Gradually the family did become accepted, and they did much of their shopping in town for groceries and summer clothing. She particularly remembered shopping at Bentley’s Jewellers, Brock’s Department Store and the two local grocery stores, Dowson’s Red & White and McKee’s Superior store.

Freda Ely spent most summers at Seven Mile Island with her two young children, and her parents, who lived in a small cottage on the property overlooking the lake. Mr. Ely lived at their Old Forest Hill Rd. home during the week, while he was tending to business, but arrived at Seven Mile Island
almost every weekend to relax and to enjoy his leisure time raising and breeding Palomino ponies.

They converted the large residence into apartments in which family and friends could stay for the summer months and enjoy horseback riding, swimming, sailing, pool-side parties and leisurely strolls around the beautiful grounds.

There were about 16 children of various family members living at Seven Mile Island throughout the summer, so a day camp was started, with a camp director and counsellors hired to run the children’s programs. “Camp Ely” was operated near the reflecting pool and also in the upper storey of the boat house. The Elys provided playground equipment, swings and a sandbox, and the counsellors taught the children crafts, played water games in shallow water of the reflecting pool, learned how to ride ponies and enjoyed hayrides. The children also had a roped-off area in the lake, near the boathouse, where they swam and played in the shallow water along the shoreline.

Among the noted families who brought their children to the island camp was comedian Frank Shuster.

Rumors that the property was being used as a refugee camp, for children rescued from
Europe during the war, are unfounded, but the fact there was a summer camp for children on the estate, may have led to this rumour.

Although Harry Ely died in 1950, it wasn’t until June 1958, that Mrs. Ely disposed of their summer home. She said the Island was truly a wonderful place filled with many unforgettable memories, and regretted having to give it up.

Mrs. Fogler sold Seven Mile Island for about $50,000 to a company called Harrison Holdings, which was owned by Patrick Harrison and his wife Lucette.

Mr. Harrison was a mining engineer at the time, and initially he and his wife used the property as a summer retreat. Eventually, the Harrisons moved in and took up permanent residence at Seven Mile Island, spending an estimated $1 million on improvements to the property, including construction of two guest houses for his daughters.

Mr. Harrison continued to live on the property for a number of years following the death of his first wife, but in 1981 at the age of 80 years, he decided to sell the estate. It took almost two years to sell the property, but ownership changed in July 1983, with a registered Ontario corporation purchasing the property for a Toronto group known as the Ching Chung Taoist Society of Canada.

The new owners began work converting the main house into a hotel, a second residence into a restaurant and divided the remaining houses into rental units. In 1984 Seven Mile Island was opened to the public and many people from the Scugog area enjoyed lunches and dinners in the restaurant as well as leisurely strolls throughout this unique property.

In 1987, the property was leased to local real estate agent Mark Smith and his partner Greg Fish. They formed a syndicate of 12 investors who intended to develop the property. This idea never came to fruition.

Next it was leased to a group who opened “Harmony Island Estate” a school for troubled boys. The school opened in October 1992 but this ven-
ture also failed. After this, the property sat virtually empty and began to deteriorate rapidly over the next few years. Unfortunately during this time, vandals struck at the estate, destroying many of the ornate statues and intricate fencework.

In June 1995 the property was transferred into the name of the International Taoist Church of Canada, and during the summer of 1998, Seven Mile Island once again was listed for sale. Unfortunately, over the past decade, the property has become run-down, fencing and buildings have started to deteriorate, or have been vandalized and this once magnificent estate is now in a sad state of disrepair.

In June 2002, a group of enthusiastic investors, many from the artistic community, purchased the property with the idea of establishing a school for the study of art. The group, Artis Orbus Inc. is headed by Charlotte Hale, owner of Veni Vidi Gallery in Port Perry. Work began immediately on stabilizing the buildings and damaged structures, as well as cleaning and clearing the property of overgrowth created by decades of neglect.

This enthusiastic group of people have an enormous job ahead of them, but in time they hope to return Seven Mile Island to its original splendor and establish a new home for the arts.
A Walking Tour of Seven Mile Island Estate

Pictures for this walking tour taken in July 1982

“Cool breezes billow across Lake Scugog, rustle through tall pine trees, and move past the sanctuary, European-style gardens and the cool white house on the southern top of the property. Only the sound of the waves lapping against the shores of the island estate and the call of the wildlife breaks the silence.”

This is how Seven Mile Island was described by a real estate company hired to sell the property for Patrick Harrison in 1982. Mr. Harrison invited a number of Port Perry business people and residents to his island retreat that summer for a barbeque, and to view the property.

The following story and photographs were recorded by Port Perry Star publisher, J. Peter Hvidsten that beautiful summer afternoon.

To reach the 26 acre estate property, we pass through two tall, cigar-shaped pillars and

Above, a large dove aviary with an old mill-wheel which turns, moving water through a series of small canals in the flower gardens.

Left, one of the many dozens of ornate statues found throughout the estate property.
proceed along a narrow 1,650 foot causeway. Over-grown brush and trees crowd the roadway and provide a beautiful canopy for the brief trip between mainland Scugog Island and this private hideaway situated in the middle of 65 acres of wildlife sanctuary.

As we reach the other side, the narrow roadway winds past two of the five houses on the property before reaching the main residence. The two-storey house consists of 28-rooms and covers about 2,600 sq. ft. per floor. On the main floor is a 24’x17’ kitchen which leads to a large dining area.

At left, one of the stone-lined, cement walkways found throughout the property that lead to the boathouse (top), located at the south end of the island at the lakeshore. On top of the two storey boathouse there was a large room with a dance floor.
Beyond another set of doors is a large living room, which incorporates beamed ceilings and a fireplace. In all there are four fireplaces in the main residence. The upper floor is taken up by eight bedrooms, a large sitting room and a den.

Leaving the house, moving west along the shoreline of Lake Scugog is an enormous rock garden with a small stream running throughout and a massive stone barbecue.

Not far away is a lookout point, seaplane dock and a beautiful 50'x24' in-ground pool, surrounded by an ornate lattice fence and globe lighting. And next to the pool is a four-bedroom house with greenhouses and a germination building.

Top photo shows the once picturesque 62' x 14' reflecting pool as it looked in the summer of 1982.
Upper left, the large bronze fountain statue which still stands in the centre of the reflecting pool.
At left is the stone Tea House which is located at the north end of the reflecting pool.
Top photo shows the magnificent white lattice fence which surrounded the inground swimming pool, overlooking Lake Scugog. The pool was located near the main residence and had two cabanas at the west end used for change rooms. At night, the pool area was illuminated by large globe lights on top of the fence which circled the pool.
Proceeding south, past the main residence again, we come upon one of the numerous stone-lined walkways. One of these leads to the lake and a large two-storey boathouse. The upper section of this building was used for elaborate parties and dancing during the 1920s and 1930s.

Strolling from the boathouse, along another of the stone walkways, we come upon a stone teahouse nestled at the end of a 62’x14’ reflecting pool. In the middle of the pool is a bronze statue of the Greek God “Mercury.”

Moving along from this tranquil setting we arrive at the roadway once again, and as we travel along the circular drive we arrive at an ornate pergola flanked at the entrance by two of the dozens of statues found throughout the property.

The pergola, an ornate lattice covered walkway, leads us back towards the main residence and to a large fountain, birdhouse and beautiful gardens on the east side of the house. We also find here a large rose garden with more walkways, a stream and ponds.

This describes Seven Mile Island as it looked, some 60 years after the Wilson’s created their island retreat.

The following description of the property was taken from a real estate sales pamphlet in 1988, when the property was for sale:

Seven Mile Island consists of approximately 95 acres of land which includes a 27 acre Island, 28 acres on the mainland and 40 acres of submerged land.

Twelve acres of the property is being used as a resort which consists of the Scugog House (restaurant), the Wilson House (bar, video room, office and 10 rooms), Durham House (four cabins), Lindsay House (four cabins), storage house, caretakers house, greenhouse, tea house, boat house, garage, three barns, tennis courts, inground pool, two sets of docks, six fountains and five ponds or pools.

Upper left, is the walkway under the pergola leading to the main residence and the gardens.

Left, the massive stone outdoor barbeque found near the shoreline, overlooking Lake Scugog.
Beechenhurst
was the magnificent estate of Dr. John H. Sangster from 1874 to 1893.

The property was later purchased by Frederick & Ethel Kent. During their ownership the property became known as Beechcroft Kent Estates.

The beautiful home of Dr. Sangster, illustrated above, was destroyed by fire in March 1881. The sketch of Sangster's 'Beechenhurst' estate, and the map, were reproduced from the Historical Atlas of Ontario County, 1877. Map at left shows location and size of the property when later owned by Frederick Kent.
These recently discovered pictures show the framing and construction of the cement dock and entrance to the boathouse at Seven Mile Island. The pictures were taken in 1925 during the construction phase.

Photos courtesy of Eleanor A. Ford, Port Perry.

The two-storey boathouse at Seven Mile Island as it looked in 1982. The structure is still standing and will soon be refurbished to its original beauty.
Hidden away in the north-east corner of Port Perry, far away from the hustle and bustle of this active and industrious community was one of the town’s most magnificent and desirable properties during the early part of the twentieth century. Access to the property, located on the west shore of Lake Scugog, was along a narrow dirt road overgrown with trees which opened up at the top of a hill and sloped to the edge of the lake. From this vantage point, there was a panoramic south-easterly view of the lake and Scugog Island, as well as the docks and mills located along Port Perry’s busy lakefront.

Historical documents for the property, which later became known as Beechenhurst, date back to the early 1800s. There have been numerous owners of the land over the past 150 years, including: Thomas Paxton; Joseph Bigelow; Hugh Lucas; James Carnegie; Madison Williams and Dr. John H. Sangster.

While Dr. Sangster owned the property, he built a huge home and began work on the grounds of the property. Unfortunately, a fire which began at 4 a.m. on March 7, 1881, completely destroyed the residence, valued at close to $18,000. A huge...
The magnificent gardens of Frederick A. Kent’s ‘Beechenhurst’ or ‘Kent Estates’ as it looked during the 1920s. In the upper photograph, Lake Scugog can be seen in the background, between the trees.
amount at the time. Dr. Sangster then built a huge rambling mansion to replace his earlier home. This home also became the victim of a fire, on February 28, 1893 (see Beechenhurst page 153).

The next owner of the property was Jonathan Blong, a longtime resident of Port Perry, who is probably best known as the man who built the beautiful “Blong Block” (now Settlement House Shops) on Queen Street. He purchased the “Beechenhurst” property from Dr. J.H. Sangster and built a large new frame house on the property. Although it was reported he was very attached to the estate, being an avid outdoorsman, Mr. Blong sold it a few years later to William E. Gimby and moved to Toronto after his health began to fail.

Mr. Gimby owned the property for only a short time before Frederick Kent arrived by car in Port Perry in May 1911 looking for a suitable location for a summer home. He ended up purchasing the house and eight acres of land from Mr. Gimby for the sum of $5,500.

On learning of the purchase, Port Perry Star publisher Samuel Farmer wrote the following article in the newspaper:

“We are pleased to be able to announce that the Gimby property has been sold to Mr. Frederick A. Kent, of Toronto, one of the firm of jewelers of that name.

Mr. Kent came to town last week in his auto. He said that he had been looking for a property suitable for a summer residence at a convenient distance from Toronto. By means of his auto the distance by time between Port Perry and Toronto is very short.

We congratulate Mr. Kent on having secured so desirable a property; and the town in securing so excellent a citizen. Port Perry is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful of Ontario towns and would prove a most suitable place for such persons who enjoy the freedom, and quiet of country life.”

Frederick Kent became the man most responsible for the development of the property, turning it into a spectacular garden paradise in just a few short years. One year after purchasing the property, Mr. Kent was reported to have started extensive improvements to the land, installing new waterworks, reshaping and levelling the lawns, building a bowling green, a house for the caretaker and his family; and building a new driveway. On seeing the need for more acreage to fulfill his plans, he purchased an additional 17 acres of adjoining land from Silas E. VanCamp for $6,650.

Work continued for years as Mr. Kent developed the property, putting in terraced gardens and lawns, a reflecting pool, fountains, urns and planting thousands of flowers and installing all the necessary irrigation. It is believed during this period Mr. Kent renamed the property “Beechcroft”, the name by which it was referred to most frequently during this period. In June 1921, Mr. Kent graciously announced that he would be opening the gardens of his Beechcroft home to the public everyday during the season.

After touring the estate in August 1924, Port Perry Star editor Samuel Farmer described the property as follows:

“For many years Beechcroft, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick A. Kent, has been a noted place in Port Perry; but never so noted or so beautiful as it is today.

Years ago Dr. J. H. Sangster used to keep the grounds after the English fashion. In those days the natural beauty of the place was fostered by those who loved beauty and loved nature. Beechcroft has been sold a number of times during the past 20 years. Mr. Jonathan Blong was in the possession of the property for a number of years and took a real interest in the place.

About ten years ago Mr. Fred Kent bought the property, and from that time it has been improved year by year until it is one of the most beautiful properties in the Province.

Yet an uninformed stranger can come and go, little suspecting that such a beautiful spot is close at hand. Situated on the northern outskirts of the town, Beechcroft is reached at the
Above, the reflecting pool with its water fountains forming an arch over the surface of the pool, which was located in the Rose Garden.

At left are two views of the terraced gardens located on the sloping hill overlooking Lake Scugog. The property was tiered and decorated with dozens of urns, benches, flowers, trees and shrubs.
end of an unattractive road and as you turn in the gate you will think "what a delightful place in which to rest."

You travel the well graveled drive in the shady coolness of the overhanging trees, through the openings of which gleams of brilliant color can be seen in the sunlight—perhaps a bed of tuberous begonias, some flaming cannas, giant castor beans, asters with great plumed heads in white and the many shades of red, mauve, and purple, or the glorious white blossoms of the hydrangeas.

And all above the trees, clumps of sturdy beeches just now loaded with nuts; evergreens whose branches sweep the ground and shrubbery in pleasing variety mingling with hollyhocks, sweet William, golden glow, delphinium, spirea and flowers that keep a covering of bloom on the well tilled beds.

With all the trees and flowers, there are spacious well-kept lawns, some with a delightful roll to them, and others terraced masses of close clipped green. In the trees and on the lawns, martens and song birds thrive.

Such is the approach to the Rose Gardens. In a place which nature seems to have reserved for just such a purpose as this, stands this crowning evidence of what man and nature can produce when they work in harmony.

Your first impression will be one of wonder that the richness such as lies before you could be hidden away on the lake shore. The trimness and cleanliness of it all are emphasized by the mirror pool with its arched sprays playing in the sunlight. White urns containing boxwood trees stand sentry at each of the short flights of white steps that lead from the higher to the lower terraces. A sundial is placed here, and a great mirrored globe there, each in the place where it belongs, while at convenient viewpoints garden seats and tables in white are placed. Best of all in this white ornamentation are the summer houses in which you can sit and, through a visit of trees, look out over Lakes Scugog.

In this setting of green and white, the roses grow; hundreds of them. The collection includes many rare species, and individual flowers and masses of bloom vie with each other in securing the admiration of the visitor. As the season advances the roses come and go, but
through all the summer there is a profusion of these glorious flowers.

Viewing with the rose gardens are the immense peony beds - now past bloom - and the dahlia and gladiola plantings.

You are at perfect liberty to visit Beechcroft and Mr. Kent has with unusual courtesy invited the public to visit the grounds. Such kindness is thoroughly appreciated, not only by Port Perry people, many of whom make frequent trips to the gardens; but by those from a distance. On a recent Sunday, fully fifty auto loads were visitors. Only last Sunday a party drove all the way from Hamilton to see the gardens.

There is one defect to this picture and that is the road that leads to and from the main highway to Beechcroft. It is too narrow and quite unsuited to the growing traffic demands, but it is expected that this defect will soon be remedied.”
Over the next decade Mr. Kent welcomed visitors from all over Ontario to his magnificent property. On one occasion in July 1924 it was reported that over 2,000 people visited the grounds to view the Beechcroft Rose Gardens. It was estimated that more than 400 automobiles were lined along both sides of the road from the railway to the property, which had become known locally as Kent Estates.

Many notables came to visit the property including Lucy Maud Montgomery who recorded in her diary; Saturday Sept 5, 1925

“Today we went down to see "the gardens" at Port Perry. A wealthy Toronto man is making a hobby of his gardens there. It is a wonderful spot, especially the "Italian Garden" and as I roamed about it and drank in my fill of beauty, life seemed a different thing and childhood not so far off. One felt safe from the hungry world in that garden. I came home with a fresh stock of courage and endurance.”

L. M. Montgomery visited the gardens several times.

Following the death of his wife, Ethel Henrietta, in January 1930, Mr. Kent announced he would not be opening his gardens at Beechcroft that summer. The entire town mourned the death of Mrs. Kent, who had formed many friends during the years she had lived in Port Perry.

Mr. Kent continued to work improving the property, doing extensive renovations to the rose gardens and grounds, but the death of his wife reduced his enthusiasm for the gardens and he closed them to the public shortly afterwards. He donated a large piece of his property, 300’ x 370’ fronting on Lilla St. (Simcoe), to the Community Memorial Hospital on December 21, 1951. He lived at Beechcroft until April 1955, when he passed away in the hospital to which he had donated property only a few years earlier. He was buried in the family plot at Mount Pleasant Cemetery in Toronto. Frederick and Ethel Kent had two children, Audrey and Beverly.
On December 22, 1958 a plan of subdivision was registered on part of the Kent property, fronting on Lilla St. (*Simcoe*), Beech St., Kent St. and forming a new street called Beechenhurst Place.

The remainder of Kent property was purchased in 1973 by a local development group, Vanedward Investments Limited of Port Perry. The company was comprised of local businessmen Ted Griffen, Grant MacDonald, Howard Forder and Dr. Robert McNab, who divided the property and built homes in what is now known as Kent Estates.

The old Kent homestead still remains today, at 434 Lakeshore Drive. It was purchased by Hans and Dianne Kraupa in May 1975 and is currently owned by Kenneth and Joanne Dutka.

The once magnificent gardens of Beechenhurst, which attracted thousands of visitors from across the province, are now little more than a memory.
In addition to the many beautiful century homes surviving around Scugog Township, there are a few notable homes which although no longer with us, are worthy of mention.

These homes, either destroyed by fire or neglect, were some of the finest of the period and the pictures and stories are the only record of homes that no longer exist.
Paxton’s ‘Beuna Vista’
*Beech Street - Port Perry*

This majestic home was one of the largest and most elegant in town when it was built at the north end of Port Perry in the mid-1870s. The full two-storey home, including a tower and covered entry, was constructed of red brick with yellow quoining. It had a large front porch with ornate trim and was located on a scenic 14 acre lot. The property fronted on both Lilla Street (*now Simcoe St.*) and Beech Street, with the entrance to the property, which became known as Beuna Vista, from Beech Street.

The impressive home was built by Thomas C. Paxton, an important Port Perry industrialist and businessman who had moved to the area from Whitby in 1821 as a young man. In 1846 Thomas and his brother George built a sawmill near Lake Scugog, and later partnered with Joseph Bigelow in a flouring mill. He was also a partner in the Paxton, Tate Foundry located on Perry Street.

Mr. Paxton led an extremely busy business career and paralleled it with an equally extensive and devoted time to public life. He held every position on the municipal council of Reach Township in its early days and was the second man to serve as Reeve of Reach Township following its formation in 1853.

Mr Paxton was elected with a large majority to the seat for North Ontario in the Ontario
Assembly, and re-elected many times. His political career ended in January 1881 when he resigned to accept the position of Sheriff of Ontario County. A few years after becoming Sheriff, Mr. Paxton and his family left their beautiful home in Port Perry to take up residence in Whitby.

The next notable person to own the large estate home was William McGill.

Mr. McGill was a prosperous Ontario County farmer who had devoted his entire life to agricultural pursuits. He was also involved in the community, serving on the Pine Grove Cemetery Bd., the Board of Education and the Reach, Port Perry and Scugog Ploughing Association.

He purchased the house from Sheriff Thos. Paxton about 1885 with the intention of making it his permanent family residence. He had plans to build extensive gardens, no doubt encouraged by Beuna Vista’s proximity to the magnificent Beechenhurst property of Dr. John H. Sangster, which abutted the property east to the shoreline of Lake Scugog. The exact date Mr. McGill and his family moved into Buena Vista is not known but due to financial problems he never did develop the attractive gardens he had planned.

Shortly after moving onto his suburban property he began to encounter investment problems. Mr. McGill became a shareholder in the Central Bank of Port Perry, losing about $1,000 when the bank closed in 1887. When the bank re-opened as the Western Bank in January 1888, Mr. McGill became the branch manager, a position he held until June 1896 when he ran into more financial problems with the announced bankruptcy of the Paxton, Tate & Co. Foundry. At the time of its fall, Mr. McGill was the largest investor in the company, losing $17,500. It wasn’t long after this bad turn of events that he announced his intention to move to California. Whether or not he ever did move is unclear.
Mr. McGill was sued by the Western Bank for $30,000 of debt incurred when the Paxton, Tate Foundry ceased business, and following a long trial at the Court House in Whithy, the jury returned an unanimous verdict for Mr. McGill over the bank. This was June 1898. One year later, on July 31, 1899, at the age of 55 years, Wm. McGill died. There is some speculation that he may have taken his own life due to his financial woes.

Silas E. VanCamp was the next owner of this property and it is believed he rented it out to a number of tenants while in his ownership.

Mr. VanCamp sold the 14 acre property in June 1915 to his neighbour Frederick Kent, who had recently purchased the Sangster property. It is reported Mr. Kent purchased the 14 acre property and house for $6,650.

Mr. Kent went on to build beautiful flowered gardens on the Sangster property, (see Beechenhurst page 153) but the Beuna Vista property was never developed to its potential and the once stately estate home began to deteriorate. Some reports suggest the Kent family began using what was left of it for keeping chickens and other small livestock. Over the years the house continued to deteriorate until it became unsafe and was finally torn down about 1960.

Long time Port Perry residents Bob Archer and Ted Griffen, remember playing in the ruins of the old building when they were young boys. Ironically Ted Griffen later became one of the owners of the property and helped developed it into the residential subdivision now known as Kent Estates. Mr. Griffen remembered the old foundation was still in the ground when they began building homes on the property in the early 1970s, and had to be removed.

A unfortunate ending for this once magnificent property, which was the home of one of Port Perry’s most industrious and well respected men, Thomas C. Paxton.
Beechenhurst

East end of Beech Street on Lake Scugog

Beechenhurst, later to become known as Kent Estates, was the most magnificent property in and around Port Perry for more than sixty years. A full story about this estate property is featured on page 121 of this book, but it’s early history includes two large, expensive homes which were both destroyed by fire during the late 1800s. Both these homes, were owned by respected physician, Dr. J.H. Sangster who had moved to Port Perry towards the end of his illustrious career.

Dr. J. H. Sangster arrived in Port Perry in November 1874, opening up an office for the practice of medicine at the corner of Queen and Perry St.

Not long after arriving in the village, Dr. Sangster purchased an attractive piece of property on the west side of Lake Scugog north of Port Perry. It was here, nestled among the trees on the slope of a hill, he built a large beautiful home overlooking the lake and the village of Port Perry to the south. He also commenced work on creating beautiful floral gardens, installing fountains and building walkways throughout the property stretching from his home all the way to the shoreline of the lake.

He named his new residence “Beechenhurst,” due to the large concen-
tration of Beech trees on the property. Access to his home was inconvenient, being located north of the property along the seventh concession of Reach, so Dr. Sangster petitioned the village council to build a new street. To his delight, in May 1877 Beech Street was opened. (see map page 153)

Dr. Sangster continued to manicure and improve his property until disaster struck. About 4 a.m. on March 7, 1881 his house was found to be on fire and all efforts to extinguish the roaring blaze failed. Within four hours the house and its contents were completely destroyed.

After his home was burned to the ground, Dr. Sangster began plans to build a new house, larger and more elegant than his previous residence. The result was a magnificent home. A picture of the house, (see page 155) accompanied by a detailed description was published in the 1886 Toronto Globe newspaper. The description follows....

"The residence of Dr. J.H. Sangster is beautifully located on the west bank of Lake Scugog, within the corporation of Port Perry. The house, built by the present owner, is of white brick and is surrounded by very extensive environmental grounds which besides the groves of beeches on the western shore, include several acres of primitive forest, fully improved and detailed.

The residence with its ample and well-stocked conservatory is said to be one of the finest in the province - its grape and hot houses and grounds form a lovely picture from the lake, and constitute one of the stateliest and choicest houses in the land.

Dr. Sangster is at present engaged in a very large and lucrative medical practice. He was formerly principal of the Toronto Normal School, and is well known as an author of the school books in exclusive use from 1860 to 1870.

He was for twelve years professor of chemistry and botany in the Medical Department of the University of Victoria College, and for the seven years immediately prior to his removal to Port Perry in 1874 he was a member of the Board of Examiners of the Medical Council. He has thus been most intimately connected with both the general and medical education of the province."

Dr. Sangster was twice married, in 1851 to Miss Mary Price, and in 1871 to Miss Caroline Elizabeth McCausland, both of Toronto.

The respected physician and educator passed away at the King Edward Hotel, Toronto on January 27, 1904, after suffering from a serious heart attack. At the time of his death he left his widow, Caroline, three sons Dr. W.A., Selwyn and Beverly, and one daughter Mrs. S.C. Corbett. He was a member of the Church of England, and was buried at Pine Grove Cemetery, Prince Albert.

His wife, Caroline Sangster passed away on April 1, 1916, at 86 years.
This huge yellow brick house took on the form of a rambling gothic baronial mansion. But the dominating elaborate four-storey tower with its crowning ironwork, the verandahs, the glass conservatory and the tall sturdy ornamentally capped chimneys, the decorated brackets to the roof with its low pitched gables, the relief like caps to the curved topped windows with their shutters, these were all features of an Italianate villa belonging to an extremely wealthy family. If this house had survived, it would have been one of the most elaborate in the province. Unfortunately in the early morning hours of February 28, 1893, a fire broke out and the home was totally destroyed. A report in the *North Ontario Observer* described the loss:

"The whole structure was enveloped in flames so that the building and contents were in a short time destroyed by the devouring element. Only a few articles were saved. This was one of the most magnificent and best appointed residences in the province and was furnished in a manner rarely excelled anywhere. The loss is a heavy one, there being only an insurance of $3,500 on the building and $3,000 on the contents."

Not long after losing his second home to fire, Dr. Sangster sold what remained of his Beechenhurst property to Johnathan Blong, a local businessman. Mr. Blong purchased the property in January 1895, erected a stately new residence that summer and moved in the following January. The home erected by Mr. Blong still stands today at 434 Lakeshore Drive.
The residence of Joshua W. Curts was not as large or impressive as Dr. J.H. Sangster’s home, but it boasted many of the same features, including an atrium. The impressive three storey red brick home was located along the shoreline of Lake Scugog, just three blocks south of Queen St. It had a turret, wrap around verandah and a green house. The home was a prominent feature on the north-east corner of Water and Scugog Streets (7A Highway).

The property, originally owned by Joseph Bigelow, was purchased by Mr. Curts about 1890 at which time he constructed “Lakeview Lodge.” The chosen name was fitting as the home looked east over the water of Lake Scugog towards Scugog Island.

The home was conveniently located at the west end of the Scugog Bridge and only two blocks from the railway station. The Curts family lived in the home for more than 30 years,
until it was destroyed by fire on the afternoon of November 4, 1930.

Due to its location at the far end of Water St. there was no supply of water to fight the fire, although the local fire brigade did all that was possible to save the property. An alarm was sent to the Brooklin Fire Department and firefighters came with a chemical fire engine, but the fire had gained too great a headway. The cause of the fire was never determined, and although Mr. Curts had some insurance, it was not enough to cover the loss.

Joshua W. Curts came to Port Perry in 1875 as an employee of the Port Perry & Port Whitby Railway, first as baggage handler and freight checker, and later he became the railway’s agent. He was a veteran of the Fenian Raids and while living in Toronto, before moving to Port Perry was a member of the Queen’s Own Rifles.

A congenial man, Mr. Curts character and business habits won him many friends. He was actively interested in public affairs, holding positions on the Board of Education, and Port Perry Council. His popularity as a public spirited citizen resulted in his being elected Reeve three consecutive years from 1886 to 1888, and once again by a large majority in both 1894 and 1895.

On the business front, Mr. Curts entered into the produce business with C.R. Henderson, forming the company Curts & Henderson. They erected two refrigerated warehouses capable of holding up to 25,000 dozen eggs. The largest warehouse burned with its contents in November 1892. The business prospered for a number of years, as Mr. Curts sent two teams out on the road gathering eggs and butter. In later years he busied himself with his farm located at the west end of the Scugog Bridge.

Mr. Curts died at 74 years of age, on February 17, 1921. His wife, Melinda May Abbot, two sisters and a half brother survived him. Melinda Curts passed away in Port Perry on March 31, 1933, at 67 years of age.
The roots of this pretty downtown Port Perry property go back to 1875 when Joseph Bigelow purchased it from John Dryden. Located on the north-west corner of Queen St., the property was conveniently situated just west of the commercial district. Joseph Bigelow kept the property for two years before selling it to Addison Richardson, owner of Richardson’s Planing Mill, in 1877. In August of 1881, the newspaper reported that Mr. Richardson’s handsome new residence opposite the town hall was nearing completion and it would prove very much of an ornament to that portion of the town.

Mr. Richardson owned the property for seven years before selling it to Dr. George H. Clemens in March 1885. When Dr. Clemens purchased the residence, there were only a few acres of cleared land around his property.

Dr. Clemens was born in Waterloo County in 1857. After earning his degree in medicine he began the practice of his profession in Berlin, Ont. (Kitchener) in 1880.

In January 1883 Dr. G.H. Clemens moved to Port Perry where he became successor to Dr. J.D. Anderson purchasing his home which was located on the north side of Queen St., three doors east of Port Perry’s Union School.
Later that year Dr. Clemens moved to a brick building on the south side of Queen St., east of the Methodist Episcopal Church, near the corner of Queen and Caleb St. In an effort to combine his residence and office in one location, the doctor moved a third time, in April 1885 to the fine brick house owned by Mr. Richardson opposite the Town Hall.

In October of 1890 he began advertising that he had a telephone in his office and a few years later in partnership with Dr. E.L. Proctor, they extended the telephone lines from Manchester to Utica.

The stately residence which Dr. Clemens called both home and office was sadly the victim of fire just 10 years after he had purchased it. At 4 a.m. on Saturday, August 24, 1895 the doctor was awoken by smoke, only to discover that his house was engulfed in flames. Fortunately Mrs. Clemens and his son, Louie, were away at Niagara at the time of the fire.

The flames spread so rapidly that Dr. Clemens had barely enough time to escape, and within minutes the entire structure and its valuable contents were nothing but a heap of debris.

The origin of the fire was never determined, although it was speculated to have started in the cellar. Loss from the fire was $11,000, an extremely large sum at this time. Dr. Clemens is reported to have been insured for $6,000 on the house, and $3,000 on the contents.

It was speculated the doctor would rebuild at once, although an article in the newspaper later that year said he would not start until the following spring. Dr. Clemens never did rebuild the house and the last we hear of him was in December 1896 when his good friend Mr. J.W. Meharry hosted a gathering of 75 guests at a party given as a farewell to the popular doctor and his wife.

Before leaving Port Perry, Dr. Clemens sold the vacant property to Dr. E.L. Proctor, his partner of many years. Dr. Proctor took over ownership in January 1897, rebuilt on the site and practiced medicine there until 1908, when he sold the property to Dr. John D. Berry and moved to Whitby to continue his practice for many years.

Dr. Berry sold the property in October 1918 to Wm. M. Real and his wife Mina who made the attractive property their home until 1942. Mr. Real served on Reach Twp. council for a number of years during the 1890s, before retiring to Port Perry, where he again held office on a number of occasions. The Reals lived in the large white house until Mr. Real’s death.

The property is owned today by local businessman, Irwin Smith (see Proctor residence page 47) owner of Ocala Orchards Winery, although he does not occupy in the building.
This attractive two-storey frame house, conveniently located near the south-west corner of Water St. and North St., overlooking Lake Scugog, was the home of William S. Sexton and his wife Amanda. The house featured a large wrap around verandah with curved roofline and a narrow band of decorative trim. There were two doors exiting onto the porch, one each on the south and east side.

The house was located on one of three lots owned by the Sextons behind the Port Perry House hotel, also known as the Sebert House, which is today the location of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce.

Mr. Sexton lived in his commodious house on Water St., behind the Sebert Hotel until 1877, when due to financial problems it was take over by the Ontario Bank. In 1883 he and his wife moved to Brooklyn.

The house was next owned by Louis A. McLean, and it was during his ownership the house was destroyed by a devastating fire which swept along the north side of Queen St.

In 1950 plans got underway for building a new arena and recreation centre on the property and on January 12, 1951 Premier Leslie Frost cut a ribbon to officially open the Port Perry Memorial Gardens Arena. Other dignitaries on hand for the gala celebration were Maple Leafs Captain Tedder Kennedy and teammate Sid Smith. The arena operated on the site until 1980, when it was torn down and the former Sexton property has since that time been used as a municipal parking lot.
This attractive home was located at the corner of North and Simcoe St., Port Perry and featured a unique mansard style roofline, which gave the large house a full third floor. It was one of only two houses built with this style of roof in the village during the 1870s. The convenient corner property was purchased in 1854 by W.S. Sexton who took out a large mortgage in 1869 to build this large, attractive home. The house was described as being “well and substantially built and consisting of eight rooms and a kitchen.” The largest section, facing onto North St., was about 25’x30’ in size, with an addition on the north which was the kitchen and pantry area. Compared with some of the larger homes along Cochrane St., the house was not as elaborate, but the wrap around porch, decorative posts and trim, arched windows, and the special attention to the window trim along the mansard roof, made the home look very striking and large.

Louisa and W.J. McMurtry, manager of the Ontario Bank, owned the house from 1883 to 1888, when they moved to the U.S.A. They sold the house to Sara Paterson, wife of well known lawyer Norman F. Paterson, who also held the position of clerk of the Village of Port Perry. The Patersons purchased the house from the McMurtry family in October 1888 for $1,500 and lived there until it burned to the ground in November 1890.

Following the fire, the Patersons took out a mortgage and built a new brick home on the property. They lived there for only a few years before selling it to James and Hannah Swan (Sr.) in April 1893. The Patersons move to a home at 62 Ella St which they had purchased a few years earlier.
Village of Port Perry - 1877
Locations of featured historic homes

BEECHENHURST
KENT ESTATES

THOS. PAXTON
BEUNA VISTA

ALLAN SEXTON
RESIDENCE

WILLIAM SEXTON
RESIDENCE

DR. GEO.
CLEMENTS HOME

JOSHUA CURTS
LAKEVIEW LODGE

SEVEN MILE
ISLAND ESTATE
Scugog’s
Lost Commercial
& Institutional
Buildings
Bigelow’s Royal Canadian Arcade
Lot 5, Queen St. (location of Settlement House Shops)

Bigelow’s "Royal Canadian Arcade" was the largest and most extensive building in the community when it opened for business in Port Perry. The impressive three-storey brick building occupied the whole of the original lot 5, and was a striking contrast to the mainly wooden structures at the time. When opened by Joseph Bigelow in April 1869, the ground floor of the new building was divided into four departments. The second floor held the Bank and a law office while the third floor was divided into further office space.

The east side of Bigelow’s building contained the following departments; carpets, millinery and dry goods. In the middle section was taken up with boots, shoes and groceries and the Royal Canadian Bank, for which Bigelow was manager.

In the centre of the block was the Phoenix Drug Store.

The entire western section of the building was occupied by Bigelow’s hardware store.

In 1878, Joseph Bigelow sold the Royal Arcade to Jonathan Blong a Toronto businessman. Rather than operate the entire store himself, Blong rented sections of the building to a number of people who operated a variety of businesses including; a hotel, the Phoenix Drug Store and hardware merchants Lang and Meharry.

The entire building was destroyed in a devastating fire during the fall of 1883
Construction began on a new combined high and public school during the summer of 1873, which later became known as the Port Perry Union School.

By October, with construction rapidly moving along, the local newspaper, the Observer, noted that the proportions of the magnificent new educational building were rapidly moving along and that it promised to rank among the finest school buildings in the Province.

Construction on the Union School continued throughout the winter and by spring was ready to be occupied.

The Observer reported that the officially opening, held on March 6, 1874, was an overwhelming success.

"The new and magnificent school building, having been sufficiently advanced to admit the pupils, held a celebration to which the public were invited. So successful was the celebration that twice as many attended as could be accommodated in the large room in which the program of entertainment by the students took place," editor James Baird wrote.

Located along Queen St., high above downtown Port Perry, the school stood like a beacon looking over the town for the more than half a century.

But like so many other important structures at this time, Port Perry Union School went up in a blaze of glory on a cold night during the spring of 1926.

Fire ripped through the magnificent structure on the evening of April 7 devouring the building and all its contents. Despite the best efforts of firmen and residents it was reduced to a pile charred wood and brick by morning.

Port Perry Star publisher Samuel Farmer described the fire as follows: "It was a wonderful spectacle. That roaring furnace of flame, situated as it was at almost the highest point in town, lit up the whole countryside. The walls had been splendidly built, and retained the fire like the sides of a huge furnace. The flames would leap high above the walls, where the wind would at times catch them, and whirl them forward in quest of new fuel."
Thomas Courtice Block
217 Queen St. (presently location of Piano Café)

Thomas Courtice moved into this new brick building in October 1874. The two-storey brick building was located on the northwest corner of Queen and Perry St, and Courtice moved into the western side of the block with his harness shop, and rented the eastern section, on the corner, to W. Trenbeth, a merchant tailor.

Like so many of Port Perry’s new commercial buildings constructed at this time, after less than 10 years the Courtice Block was destroyed during the devastating fire of July 1884. The fire wiped out the entire business section of the town.

George Currie Block
209 Queen St. (presently location of Port Perry Pharmacy)

George Currie purchased this property on the north-east corner of Queen and Perry St. in 1870 and two years later constructed this two-story brick building shown from which to operate his business. Mr. Currie was a well respected clothing, hardware and grocery merchant in Prince Albert during the 1960s, but when business began to shift to Port Perry, Currie purchased made preparations to move his operation.

Towards the end of the 1870s, Mr. Currie retired from business and sold his interest to his son-in-law John H. Brown. The Currie Block was destroyed by the fire of July 1884.

These buildings are a small sampling of the many commercial buildings which were destroyed and lost forever at this time in our history.
Aaron Ross, an industrious grain merchant in Prince Albert, moved to Port Perry during the exodus caused by the arrival of the railway in the village, and erected this elegant three story brick building with a mansard roof in 1871. When it opened, on the southeast corner of Queen and Water St., the eastern half of the building was leased to the Ontario Bank and in the western half, Mr. Ross operated a general store in partnership with John H. Brown.

Upstairs, David J. Adams had his business as an insurance agent and broker. Adams began his business as a Banker and broker in Prince Albert in 1860, joining in the exodus to Port Perry in 1871. As his business expanded his son David Douglas Adams became a partner.

This building along with almost every commercial store in downtown Port Perry was destroyed by fire in July 1884.
Utica Memory Hall
Village of Utica, Ontario

Utica Memory Hall was designed and built by Thomas W. Horn, a former village resident. Mr. Horn was a prominent lawyer and financial businessman in Toronto when built the hall as a gift to the community, in remembrance of his old home and his youthful days in the village. The gala opening of Utica Memory Hall took place on Friday, Dec. 1, 1899.

Mr. H.J. Gould, ex-Warden of the county presided as chairman, and the keys of the hall were formally handed over by Mr. Horn to the following board of trustees: Enoch Kendall, Arthur Crosier, Wm. Brooks, D. Horn, John Horn, Wm. Ward, John McKercher.

The hall was 38x65, has a seating capacity of nearly 400 and is designed in the Spanish renaissance style of architecture, with two towers. In handing over the keys, Mr. Horn said he did so with the wish and expectation that the hall be used for the benefit of the community. He attached the single condition that the churches and school should have the use of it free.

In naming the hall, the Hon. John Dryden suggested that more appropriate than Horn’s Hall, or Public Hall, would be the name "Memory Hall," and he offered that name for consideration. The audience expressed their approval by a show of hands.

It was always Mr. Horn’s ambition to succeed, but he was always proud to be remembered as a boy of Utica. He believed that association of people with each other broadened, brightened and improved the mind, and it was his hope that the hall might serve such a purpose.

On Saturday afternoon, April 9, 1955 the Memory Hall was destroyed by a fire started by a spark of a nearby grass fire, and within a very short time the entire building was laid to ashes in less than a half-hour.

It was replaced by the present Utica Hall in Oct. 1957.
The Utica Memory Hall was built by a successful Toronto lawyer and financier named Thomas W. Horn, who grew up in the village. Mr. Horn gave the hall to the residents of Utica in remembrance of his youth while attending school in the village. The hall, located on the southwest corner of the village, was officially opened on Dec. 1, 1899 and unfortunately was lost to fire in April 1955. A new Memory Hall was opened on the same corner in Oct. 1957.

Photo courtesy Larry and Doreen Kendall.