

## At Work in Meadowvale Village

Thomas F. McIlwraith

Volume 108, numéro 2, fall 2016

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1050596ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050596ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

### Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

### ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer cet article

McIlwraith, T. F. (2016). At Work in Meadowvale Village. *Ontario History*, 108(2), 233–254. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050596ar>

### Résumé de l'article

L'histoire de l'industrie et de la population ouvrière ontarienne est profondément liée aux usines et moulins à eau qui bordaient les rives des nombreux cours d'eau partout dans la province. Chaque site était composé d'un regroupement de logements, de magasins généraux, d'églises, d'abris pour voyageurs etc. Le village de Meadowvale, fondé durant les années 1830 sur les berges de la rivière Credit à Mississauga, est un de ces sites, où, maintes générations après son apogée industrielle, on peut encore apercevoir un paysage vernaculaire de village à moulin. Grâce à une communauté de bénévoles prêts à saisir les opportunités fournies par la Loi sur le patrimoine de l'Ontario (1974), ainsi qu'une administration locale favorable aux efforts de conservations, cette merveille d'un Ontario traditionnel a résisté au processus de suburbanisation de la région. Meadowvale continue à fleurir au 21<sup>ème</sup> siècle en tant qu'enclave résidentielle distincte au sein d'une ville gigantesque.

# *At Work in Meadowvale Village*

by Thomas F. McIlwraith

## *Introduction*

“The old mill” is one of Ontario’s enduring symbols of its industrial heritage, all but obliterated from today’s landscape. Silverthorn’s mill, some ten kilometers up the Credit River from its mouth, has been gone for more than sixty years, but the village—Meadowvale—that it spawned in the 1840s lives on. In street names, workers’ houses, the church and the inn, the twenty-first-century landscape triggers memories of Meadowvale’s industrial roots. Celebrating Meadowvale is nothing new. Fully a hundred years ago the picturesqueness of this riverside village drew artists, lecturers and picnickers—outsiders riding the suburban electric car from Toronto. In the 1960s the heritage conservation movement embraced Meadowvale, lying as it was in the path of suburban growth. Concerned Mississauga citizens joined village residents in committing countless volunteer hours to assuring that the essence of this mill village landscape would not be compromised. Road diversions, deft use of the Ontario Heritage Act, creative work

with land developers, and the institution of a village overview committee are all components of bringing the village to its present state, a blend of modern practicality and institutional memory. This essay is Meadowvale’s story.

7067 Pond Street, Mississauga, is a working-class address. It identifies a modest double house that stands barely meters beyond the flood plain of the Credit River in the northerly part of the city in what is commonly known as Meadowvale village. (Figure 1) These two units, and a similar double house next door at 7079 Pond Street, were built in the 1850s, providing accommodation for workers in local water-powered milling industries. By 2012, the two units at 7067 Pond Street had been merged into a single-family dwelling, enlarged to the rear and serving suburban residential needs in a large city. There is nothing modest about it. 7067 Pond Street is central to the story of industrial heritage conservation in an enlightened city, Mississauga, in the later twentieth century.

## *Abstract*

*Ontario's industrial and working-class history has deep roots in the water-powered mills and factories that lined scores of streams throughout the province. Each site drew its cluster of dwellings, general stores, church sanctuaries, travellers' rests and more. Meadowvale village, founded in the 1830s on the Credit River in Mississauga, is one of these places, and, not simply by chance, it continues to display its mill village vernacular landscape generations after its industrial heyday has passed. Thanks to a community of energetic volunteers responding to opportunities provided by the Ontario Heritage Act (1974), plus a receptive civic administration, this gem of traditional Ontario has withstood suburbanization as it swept across the region. Meadowvale flourishes in the twenty-first century as a distinctive residential enclave in a huge sprawling city.*

**Résumé:** *L'histoire de l'industrie et de la population ouvrière ontarienne est profondément liée aux usines et moulins à eau qui bordaient les rives des nombreux cours d'eau partout dans la province. Chaque site était composé d'un regroupement de logements, de magasins généraux, d'églises, d'abris pour voyageurs etc. Le village de Meadowvale, fondé durant les années 1830 sur les berges de la rivière Credit à Mississauga, est un de ces sites, où, maintes générations après son apogée industrielle, on peut encore apercevoir un paysage vernaculaire de village à moulin. Grâce à une communauté de bénévoles prêts à saisir les opportunités fournies par la Loi sur le patrimoine de l'Ontario (1974), ainsi qu'une administration locale favorable aux efforts de conservations, cette merveille d'un Ontario traditionnel a résisté au processus de suburbanisation de la région. Meadowvale continue à fleurir au 21<sup>ème</sup> siècle en tant qu'enclave résidentielle distincte au sein d'une ville gigantesque.*

The double workers' cottages of Meadowvale village have never lost their relevance, even as the local mill hands that lived in them, within walking distance of the workplace, have long since been succeeded by commuters motoring to jobs scattered throughout a metropolitan region. A tightly-knit industrial village, anchored to the Credit River for its non-portable water power, has transformed into a district of footloose residents. It is said that a big Victorian penny, dated 1854, was found beneath one of the two doorsteps of 7067 during the rebuilding in 1985, a talisman

suggesting a likely date of construction and supposedly endowing the dwelling with special powers. The plank-on-plank style of construction, a simple technology that made good use of seconds from the scrap wood of the booming lumber industry, has obviously produced a durable framework. (Figure 2) Chances are the occupants were themselves involved in the construction, immigrants glad to apply their limited house-building skills in a useful way. Survival for more than a century and a half, including a wholesale reconstruction offering promise of many more years of useful service, would seem



*FIGURE 1. The two front porches at 7067 Pond Street show that it was once a double house. This structure, dating from the 1850s, was rebuilt as a single dwelling, and extended behind, in 1985. (Author photo, February 1987)*

to fulfill the spirit of the penny.<sup>1</sup>

An historical plaque in the village tells passers-by that the first people of European roots to reach the Meadowvale site were 29 Irish families from Manhattan, in 1819. Little is known of these people, but the Irish were not part of the Tory English Establishment in Upper Canada and became noted for being the backbone of the emerging industrial work force. Some hired out to clear the land, others built roads, canals and, later, railways. Serving

as mill hands was part of the same culture, and opportunity must have drawn such people to Meadowvale in increasing numbers during the 1840s. Between 1845 and 1848 Francis Silverthorn (1815-1894) purchased 375 acres of land in the Credit River valley between Streetsville and Brampton, including 7.5 acres that would become the site of Meadowvale village.<sup>2</sup> For the next fifteen years the Silverthorn family presided over the establishment of industry along one of the important wa-

<sup>1</sup>Thirteen plank-on-plank houses stood in Meadowvale in 2012. "Meadowvale Village Heritage Conservation District Plan Review," (Cultural Division, Community Services, City of Mississauga, October 2012), typescript, 62. (Hereafter called 'HCD Plan Review.')

<sup>2</sup>Kathleen A Hicks, *Meadowvale: Mills to Millennium*. (Mississauga Library System, 2004), xvii. The 7.5 acres were in the east half of Lot 11, Concession 2 West of Hurontario Street (WHS), in the New Survey of Toronto Township, Peel County. The house numbers used in this essay are modern; they are a convenient means of identifying properties formerly unnumbered.





FIGURE 2. Short 'seconds' left over from the sawmill were nailed together in the plank-on-plank construction technique. Planks were offset in order to provide an uneven bonding surface for stucco and plaster. This is 7067 Pond Street during rebuilding in February 1985. (Author's photo)

terpower streams in southern Ontario.<sup>3</sup> A sawmill and a grist mill were running later in 1845 with an unknown number of hands at work. The gristmill burned in 1849, Silverthorn rebuilt, and was back in full business in 1852. Later he added a barrel and stave factory and entered into flour milling. Wood from the sawmill was reportedly used in planking Hurontario Street in 1849, a labour-intensive activity to be sure. In 1853 the Johnson brothers started manufacturing farm machinery at their Mammoth Iron Works and Foundry. They employed twenty men at first, a

number that soon grew to seventy.<sup>4</sup>

Population of Meadowvale was approaching 200 by the mid-1850s, and its prosperity was reflective of good times across the Province of Canada in those years. This decade marked the first generation of railway construction, and manufacturing, much of it based on water-power, was being aggressively promoted. The Johnson brothers started building houses for their workers.<sup>5</sup> In the late 1840s Silverthorn took up residence in the comfortable frame house still standing in 2012 at 7050 Old Mill Lane (Figure 3),<sup>6</sup> and now he, too, started constructing houses for his employees and their families. Among the first was 'the boathouse' (as it was later known), a plank-on-plank structure at 7070 Old Mill Lane, put up about 1852.<sup>7</sup> Some four years later he built the two double houses at 7067 and 7079 Pond Street; they became known as "Quality Row."<sup>8</sup> This activity may be traced on Silverthorn's plan of subdivision, registered in Peel County in July,

<sup>3</sup> In May 1847 Silverthorn bought 100 acres more in lot 11, and 167 acres in lot 12, Con 3 WHS. In 1848 he bought the west half of Lot 12 in Concession 2 (100 acres). Hicks, *Meadowvale*, xvii.

<sup>4</sup> Hicks, *Meadowvale*, 56. HCD Plan Review, 20, 36.

<sup>5</sup> None of Johnson brothers' domestic buildings were extant in 2012, but their wagon shop still stands on Lot 89 in Willow Lane. Hicks, *Meadowvale*, 57.

<sup>6</sup> This house was probably built about 1844, and was used by Credit Valley Conservation Authority (CVCA) as its office from 1965 to 1987, after which it reverted to domestic use. HCD Plan Review, 12.

<sup>7</sup> The boathouse was probably a worker dwelling until about 1895. By 1909 it had become a storage place for boats used by fishermen angling on Willow Lake, the former mill pond, created in 1908. Hicks, *Meadowvale*, xx.

<sup>8</sup> Hicks, *Meadowvale*, viii.

FIGURE 3. Francis Silverthorn built this storey-and-a-half house for himself in the late 1840s. 7050 Old Mill Lane. (Author photo)



1856. (Figure 4) We know almost nothing about the occupants of these four dwellings, beyond the fact that they were tenants and left no imprint on the title deeds or assessment roles. The decennial censuses may yield some clues to the enterprising genealogist, but are problematical.<sup>9</sup>

By the time of the economic downturn in 1857, Meadowvale displayed the usual rural village accoutrements: blacksmith,

schoolhouse, wagon shop, general merchants, shoemaker and postmaster.<sup>10</sup> The

FIGURE 4. In July 1856 Francis Silverthorn registered this plan of subdivision (oriented eastward) of the village of Meadowvale, on a part of the east half of survey Lot 11, Concession 3 WHS. Village lot 10 on Mill Street (now named Old Mill Lane) is the site of 7050; village lots 18 to 21 on Pond Street are the sites of 7079 and 7067. Silverthorn's mill is the large building at the corner of Mill Street and Sideroad 10-11. (Mississauga Heritage Foundation)



<sup>9</sup>The industrialist Charles Gooderham and his wife Eliza reportedly lived in one of these buildings for a brief period about 1870, while their estate was being built. See Figure 6, below. Hicks, *Meadowvale*, 77.

<sup>10</sup>Hicks, *Meadowvale*, 57.





FIGURE 5. *William Gooderham's store, about 1885. It burned in 1907. (Region of Peel Art Gallery, Museum, and Archives)*

Methodist congregation and its pastor got a church building in 1863 (still in use in 2012), but never a cemetery; caskets went upstream to Churchville for burial. Teamsters took grain and flour along Centre Road (Hurontario Street) to Brampton for delivery to the Grand Trunk Railway, newly opened between Toronto and Stratford during 1856. All these activities, plus the increasing assort-

The Bell hotel in all probability was used for seasonal workers and others waiting for permanent space; family houses may have taken in tenants. One could argue that just about all village dwellings were 'worker houses,' even if in modern times that cachet has been limited to a few picturesque terraces.

William Gooderham (1790-1881), industrialist and banker, entered the



Meadowvale picture in 1854, the year when the Silverthorn mill burned for a second time. He rebuilt again (a paternalistic response for which his work-

FIGURE 6. *The Charles Gooderham Estate, about 1900. It is a private school in 2012. (Region of Peel Art Gallery, Museum, and Archives)*

ers and tenants must have been grateful) and Gooderham became the mortgage-holder. Following a third fire in 1859, Gooderham foreclosed on Silverthorn and took over ownership of the mill and Silverthorn's general store.<sup>11</sup> Silverthorn moved to Toronto (and must have missed the Meadowvale census-taker by mere days), and village industrial activity continued under the Gooderham name.<sup>12</sup> Gooderham expanded the flour mill, and had five clerks and more than a dozen dressmakers and tailors working in the store about 1870. (Figure 5) The cooperage employed six hands.<sup>13</sup> In 1870 William Gooderham built the grandest house in the village, the 21-room estate at the northeast corner of Second Line West and Derry Road, for his son Charles ("Holly") Gooderham (1842-1915). There could be no surer sign of prosperity and optimism.<sup>14</sup> (Figure 6)

Village population was over 350 by 1880, a year after the Credit Valley Railway between Toronto and Orangeville brushed by the village to the west, across the Credit. This station, on Derry Road, was much closer than Brampton. Wheat came by train, was carried to Gooderham

mill, and then barreled flour sent back to the railway to continue on to market.<sup>15</sup>

Following the death of William Gooderham in 1881, the family's influence faded.<sup>16</sup> Meadowvale village entered a period of slow decline as a rural nexus. Amid the variety of industrial activities late in the nineteenth century, it was the big flour mill that best exemplified the rural character of the village, along with worker cottages such as 7067 Pond Street. For several years during the 1890s the mill was inactive, but then sprang to life again in the first decade of the twentieth century, only to decline once more with the end of commercial milling in 1911.<sup>17</sup> This sort of volatility must have been paralleled by tenants moving in and out of the rental housing, accounting for the difficulty in tracing details about occupancy.

Meadowvale village began to take on the appearance of a retreat for city folk with no inclination for heavy labour. For a few years around 1910 the current mill-owner offered recreational boating on the enlarged mill pond, renting boats and canoes out of 'the boathouse' (7070 Old Mill Lane). Few of the interlopers would

<sup>11</sup> March 1861. HCD Plan Review, 20.

<sup>12</sup> William Gooderham is better known as proprietor of Gooderham and Worts distillers of Toronto. Their buildings comprise the Distillery District in Toronto in 2012. James Gooderham Worts was the nephew of William Gooderham. See Dianne Newell, "William Gooderham." *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol XI (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 358-60.

<sup>13</sup> Hicks, *Meadowvale*, 63-64.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Gooderham was proprietor of the Alpha Knitting Mills in Streetsville, and lived in the house from 1870 to 1884. "Gooderham Estate Blvd" is a street name in the adjacent suburban development.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Andreae, *Lines of Country*, (Toronto: Stoddard, 1997), 129.

<sup>16</sup> William's son, James, had been killed in an accident on the Credit Valley Railway in 1879. Newell, 360.

<sup>17</sup> HCD Plan Review, 25.



FIGURE 7. A grindstone is mounted at the site of the Silverthorn mill, opposite the Bell hotel on Old Derry Road. (Author photo, December 1998)

have considered themselves working class, and, for those who stayed for extended periods, occupying the utilitarian workers' houses would have been part of the charm of the village. For architectural historian Eric Arthur, who discovered the mill building in the 1930s, it provided an opportunity to engage in heritage conservation, an unexplored discipline at the time. For twenty years he directed his students from the University of Toronto School of Architecture in preparing measured drawings.<sup>18</sup> By the time grinding grain and feed for local farm purposes ceased in 1950, the aging mill was well known and had been extensively documented. Once closed, it quickly became a fire hazard and a danger to venturesome children. In 1953 architectural historian and Toronto Township councillor Anthony Adamson suggested the mill be used as a summer stock theatre; the Stratford Festival tent was going up for the first time, and the spirit in the arts world was awake to such initiative.<sup>19</sup> But it was not to be. The idea of such creative adaptation was a generation ahead of its time, and in April 1954 Silverthorn's



century old mill was unceremoniously demolished.<sup>20</sup> A mounted grindstone stands as a token reminder of the employment the mill gave to generations of local men and their families. (Figure 7)

The slow decline had provided a gentle introduction to a scenic, and even romanticized, image of Ontario industrial village life that was fast being overtaken by the automobile and the big city. That transition was manifested in the succession of occupants and owners of the Gooderham estate and, particularly, of a half century of artists who came to record the scenes in oil and watercolour, on canvas and by mural.

Charles and Emily Gooderham vacated their estate in 1884.<sup>21</sup> Subsequent turnover has been frequent, with some sixteen title-holders in 140 years offer-

<sup>18</sup> Angela Carr, "Eric Arthur," *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Historica-Dominion, 2011), online.

<sup>19</sup> *Toronto Star*, 16 April 1953.

<sup>20</sup> Machinery may remain buried in the site, filled in, awaiting the attention of a future industrial archaeologist. HCD Plan Review, 30.

<sup>21</sup> Hicks provides a useful resume of occupants and owners upon which the next two paragraphs are based; *passim*.

ing a glimpse into the evolving village through that span of time. The early people were locals, few of whom would be described as working class; the house simply does not fit that image. In 1884 Angélique Davis paid \$4,500 and owned it until 1888 when she sold (at a loss) to Thomas Graham, for \$3,600. His family owned large acreages east of Meadowvale (Grahamsville); he had been a councillor in Toronto Township in the 1870s, and Grand Master of the Orange Lodge for the forty years since its inception in 1834. It sounds as if the estate was Graham's genteel retirement home. By 1895, when John Watt, another local person, took possession, the price had dipped to \$2,000. Watt beguilingly named the estate 'Rose Villa,' and promoted it as a summer tourist resort for elite Torontonians. Guests might come by carriage, or be met by a van at the railway station west of the village, across the river.<sup>22</sup> Rose Villa seems to have had a short-lived existence, but perhaps long enough to catch the attention of the artistic and literary community, for nine years later the French artist Georges Chavignaud (1865-1944) bought the estate for \$3,000. The price had bottomed out, and in 1905 Samuel Curry assumed ownership for \$3,500.<sup>23</sup> His brother Walter, who was a Liberal Member of the Provincial Legislative Assembly for one session, between 1919 and 1923, is said to have occupied it from time to time, but it was hardly convenient to his constituency, Toronto Southeast.

Following the end of the flour trade and the passage of the First World War, prices surged. Major-General François-Louis Lessard, a Boer War veteran who had no apparent local connection, paid Curry \$9,000 for the estate in 1920. Two more transactions followed, and in 1951 the price had advanced more than four-fold, to \$40,000. For more than twenty years the house met institutional needs, first with the Ukrainian Catholic Church and later the Lutheran Church. The estate turned over for \$175,000 in the 1970s, and at this time the subdued Italianate dignity was replaced by the somewhat incongruous Greek portico and the whole place painted white. It became an exhibit hall for handicrafts, and then a series of apartments. Monarch Development Corporation spent \$500,000 on renovations in 1997 and used the house as a sales presentation office for their subdivision. Since 2000, it has been home for Rotherglen Montessori School. In its resilience, adaptability and durability, the Gooderham estate is a metaphor for continuity in Meadowvale as a whole.

As a segue into the post-milling, post-Gooderham era, we may turn to 1101 Old Derry Road, off Willow Lane. This cottage, built by the Gooderhams, was for a time rented by Henrietta Hardy, born in Meadowvale and the grandmother of A.J. Casson (1898-1992), the distinguished Group of Seven artist. Casson spent summers there between 1907 and 1920, and as a teenager painted in the village for two

<sup>22</sup> HCD Plan Review, 27.

<sup>23</sup> Chavignaud stayed in the estate only one year, 1904-1905, but returned to live elsewhere in the village from 1929 until his death.

weeks in 1917. Along with his contemporary Lawren Harris, Casson had an urban element in his pallet, and I am persuaded that the Meadowvale landscape inspired many of his village paintings set in King Township and York County during the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>24</sup>

Meadowvale was a lively place for artists in the 1920s, drawn by the fine scenery and gentle pace of life. Artist Harry Spiers' effusive pamphlet praising the picturesqueness of the village, published in 1904, was an encouragement.<sup>25</sup> Access was improved with the opening of the Toronto Suburban Railway in 1917, running electric cars between the Toronto Junction stock yards area and Guelph. It crossed Derry Road at Stop 47, mere steps west of the mill on the village side of the Credit.<sup>26</sup> The abutments for the bridge across the mill tailrace were still in place in 2012, the railway long gone. Residents of the village recall students from the Ontario College of Art boarding at the Apple Tree Inn and other houses in the 1920s, often donating paintings to their host families in appreciation of their hospitality.<sup>27</sup>

Besides Casson, the best-known painter was Fred S. Haines (1879-1960), who came to Meadowvale in 1896 from Meaford. He owned a house on Willow

Lane (number 1147 in 2012) between 1903 and 1916, and took an active role in community life. Haines painted a mural in the school in 1910, depicting Indians canoeing on the Credit River. It lasted there, abused, until 1958, when the school was closed and the building became a community hall. The mural faced an uncertain future before rescue and restoration in 1976 and finally ended up in Mississauga City Hall. At least nine other serious painters worked in the village at various times, in addition to the art students and architects.<sup>28</sup> And then there was the Fortnightly Club, a literary, music, poetry and philosophical society, founded in 1903.<sup>29</sup> For years "Professor" Frank Brown of Brampton, orator and elocutionist, presided over a succession of speakers, readings, debates and performances. Meadowvale was evolving into a cultural hearth.

Life in the village ran slow between the wars. The Toronto Suburban car brought urban picnickers to the Credit River at Meadowvale, Churchville and Eldorado Park, just as the Credit Valley Railway had carried city visitors to Watts' 'Rose Villa' years before. But the trolley was doomed by the automobile and the Great Depression, and ran for the last time in 1931.<sup>30</sup> We know nothing of families

<sup>24</sup> Paul Duval, *A.J. Casson, His Life and Works: a tribute*. (Toronto: Cerebrus / Prentice-Hall, 1980).

<sup>25</sup> Harry Spiers, *A Souvenir of the Village of Meadowvale-on-the-Credit*. (Meadowvale: Author, 1904).

<sup>26</sup> Andreae, *Lines of Country*, 133. The passenger shelter at Stop 47 has been preserved at the Halton County Radial Railway museum, north of Campbellville on the right-of-way of the same Toronto Suburban Railway that passed through Meadowvale village. It is perhaps the only Meadowvale structure that endures beyond the village limits.

<sup>27</sup> Hicks, *Meadowvale*, 103.

<sup>28</sup> Among them were Tom Roberts and Tom Stone, whose works, along with those of Chavignaud, are in the Peel Region Art Gallery collection in Brampton.

<sup>29</sup> Hicks, *Meadowvale*, 115.



living at 7067 Pond Street, but can imagine that their youth sought the workshop floors and business offices across industrial Ontario, even as the parents hung on in the familiar setting. Many of those same sons and daughters returned to parental homes and gardens after 1929, riding out the Great Depression there. Meadowvale became a temporary holding-place for its unemployed young people.

Malton Airport opened in 1937 and became an employment hub a half hour away by automobile. The airport and its surroundings grew rapidly, especially during the Second World War and on into the post-war era of manufacturing giants such as A. V. Roe Limited and Orenda Engines. Meadowvale village began to function as a suburb, its residents less and less committed to working among themselves and increasingly driving to jobs far afield. Many occupied newer houses which had been appearing since the 1920s on sizable lots stretching southward along Second Line. This vernacular appendage to the old village was a tangible expression of what it meant to own a 1938 Nash or a 1948 Studebaker and hit the road. The Robson Arms hotel on Derry Road became a small apartment house.

The Town of Mississauga succeeded Toronto Township in 1968, and the City of Mississauga was incorporated six years later. These were the administrative manifestations of mushrooming urbaniza-

tion surging outward from the Toronto epicentre by 1970. Long-time villagers, many of them retired farmers, cringed as Highway 401 swept by to the south. They feared that the widening of Derry Road, first proposed in 1972, would eviscerate their bucolic hamlet. Already, in 1969, and years before any conservation activity had been initiated, they had banded together under the name of the Meadowvale Village Community Association, determined to resist whatever external threats might arise. For the first time in its existence, Meadowvale village had its own voice. In a quality-of-life statement in 1973, focused on beautification, villagers spoke of “maintain[ing] the properties and grounds in good, attractive *and authentic* repair.”<sup>31</sup> It was an important forecast of the Heritage Conservation District discussion to pick up later in the decade, in which the village worker cottages would receive much of the attention.

The Community Association rode a wave of nostalgia that had been building in Canada through the 1960s. Centennial celebrations in 1967 had a lot to do with it, as did publication of books such as *The Ancestral Roof*, and building restoration work by people like Napier Simpson. Blake and Greenhill’s *Rural Ontario* featured lovely churches, town halls and mansions, but also broadened the scope from individual buildings to include settings: a lot, a street, a neighbourhood.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Andreae, *Lines of Country*, 135.

<sup>31</sup> Italics mine. Joan Guerts, “Brief re preservation [of] Meadowvale Village, submitted to the General Committee [of the City of Mississauga] (Meadowvale Village Community Association, May 31, 1974), 3<sup>rd</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> Marion MacRae and Anthony Adamson, *The Ancestral Roof: Domestic Architecture of Upper Canada*. (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1963); Verschoyle B. Blake and Ralph Greenhill, *Rural Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969).



FIGURE 8. *A Meadowvale collage, from sixty sketches by architect Bill Thomson, demonstrating the vernacular character of the village. (Meadowvale Village Heritage Conservation District Plan (City of Mississauga, May 1980), Appendix B, page A-15.*

Less distinguished buildings, including garages and gazebos, country stores and barns, plus plantings, farmsteads, fences and more, got carried along with the concept. So did working-class housing. Few examples appeared on early listings of heritage buildings, but now such places as 7067 Pond Street started to be recognized.

All this initiative preceded passage of the Ontario Heritage Act in 1974. Two years later the city of Mississauga, acting under the provisions of the Act, established the Local Architectural Conser-

vation Advisory Committee (LACAC), comprised mainly of citizen volunteers, to provide advice to Council on heritage matters. After honing its skills on the process of designating individual buildings, LACAC picked up on the concept of the Heritage Conservation District (HCD), provided for in Section V of the Act but as yet untried.<sup>33</sup> District designation looked attractive, for it seemed to provide for the less-than-spectacular pieces of the Ontario landscape, the very substance of Meadowvale. (Figure 8)

Beginning in 1978 the Meadowvale

<sup>33</sup> Ontario Heritage Act, RSO 1980, c.337. 'Designation' is a technical term, referring to the municipal bylaw that declares a particular building or district as being covered by the provisions of protection and conservation established in the Ontario Heritage Act. The Act was amended in 1989 and revised in 2005.

Village Community Association and Mississauga LACAC undertook with members of the City's planning department to create a secondary planning district within the City's official plan that coincided with the village. The resultant district was the only one in the city at that time to declare heritage as the governing principle. Thirteen of 56 buildings in the village, including the worker cottages, had already been listed as being of historical or architectural significance, and could have been proposed for designation in their own right.<sup>34</sup> But the LACAC recognized how much more meaningful those buildings would be when surrounded by the other 43, drawing strength from the presence of each other and the setting of roadways, treelines and fences in which they all shared. Together, the 56 gave powerful support to the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and that worker housing is ever so much more meaningful when the environment in which the workers functioned is recognized too.

LACAC members understood that allowance for 'controlled change' was necessary for designation; freezing or retrofitting to some earlier date made no sense, and was inconsistent with the village experience.<sup>35</sup> Bill Thomson, the city planner handling the file, spent many an

evening at kitchen tables and in living rooms in the village, persuading reluctant residents that the HCD offered the best chance for the village to continue essentially as it was.<sup>36</sup> Fears that district designation would diminish property and resale values were mitigated when residents realized that district designation would help in creating the Derry Road bypass, without which their village would be ruined. By the time the HCD was declared in November 1980,<sup>37</sup> residents were thoroughly on side, and felt good about what their input had accomplished. It was grass-roots community activism at its best. Meadowvale was Ontario's first Heritage Conservation District.<sup>38</sup>

Credit Valley Conservation Authority and the City differed on how and where the bypass road was to be constructed, however, and there were anxious moments in the early 1980s as the discussion dragged on. Subdivision plans were being registered on three sides of the village; traffic signals were installed at the increasingly busy crossing of Derry Road and Second Line. Visions of Cooksville, recently gutted by the widening of Dundas and Hurontario Streets, were disturbing, and one of the three workers' double cottages downstream at Barberton had been demolished even as heritage legis-

<sup>34</sup> Rachel Lickiss, "Village Conservation in Ontario." Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Toronto Department of Geography, August 1984, 36.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas F. McIlwraith, "The Village of Meadowvale: principles and notes." Typescript, Mississauga LACAC, December 1976, 3 pages.

<sup>36</sup> Lickiss, "Village Conservation," 34-35.

<sup>37</sup> City of Mississauga By-law 453-80.

<sup>38</sup> Details of these events are fully laid out in Bill Thomson, "Meadowvale Village: the interrelationships between heritage conservation and city planning." *Plan Canada*, 25:1 (March 1985), 10-20. See also Lickiss, "Village Conservation," 26-42.



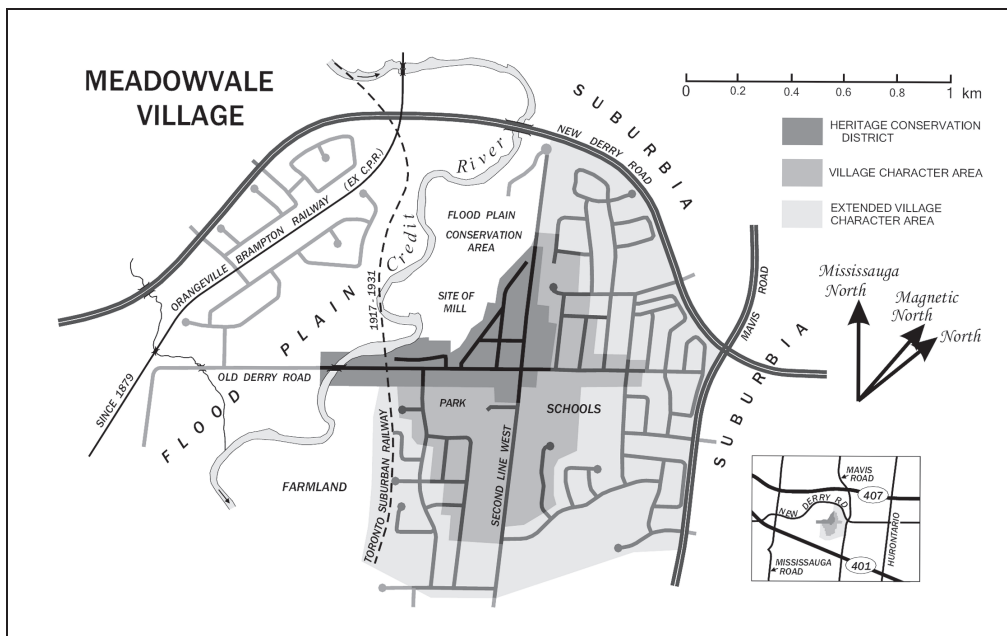


FIGURE 9. New Derry Road, opened in 1994, secured the survival of Meadowvale Village. Adjacent subdivision development took place under guidelines inspired by the Heritage Conservation District. (Cartography by Dugald Carmichael)

lation was proceeding. Still, the HCD designation held, and it was a triumphal moment when New Derry Road, skirting around the village on a northerly curving route, opened in November 1994. (Figure 9) Mavis Road served the same function for north-south traffic, swinging to the east and leaving Second Line West undisturbed. These two new arterial roads met in a huge intersection east of Meadowvale, previously a farm field, now with left-turn lanes and curving ramps in all directions. Back in the village the traffic signals came down, and the old corner at Second Line West and Old Derry Road (as it was now known) reverted to the

quiet appearance and functions much as had always been.<sup>39</sup> (Figure 10)

A further effect of the bypass roads has been to truncate the four arms of the village crossing. (Figure 9) Northward Second Line comes to a dead-end facing the steep embankment that is the berm of New Derry Road. A sharp turn leads motorists to parking space in the Conservation Authority park on the Credit River flood plain. Southward, the Second Line bridge across Highway 401 stands, but is slated for removal, and the road beyond has been obliterated in a scramble of suburban cul-de-sacs. East and west, Old Derry Road traffic has to take circuitous

<sup>39</sup> The traffic signals at Second Line West and Old Derry had been hastily erected after a serious accident there. They were mounted on temporary poles and the installation was never intended to be permanent. But it looked ominous. Personal communication with village resident Jim Holmes.

FIGURE 10. Looking southward along Second Line where it crosses Old Derry Road, in 2012. This might have been the intersection of two six-lane arterial roads. The 1863 Methodist Church stands on the southwest corner, with the 1871 village school (later, community hall) visible beyond. (Author photo)



routes to and from the rest of the city. Meadowvale has

been isolated, and is considerably more difficult to reach than in its rural days. GPS navigation systems have real utility here!

Lickiss makes the useful point that Meadowvale village was designated for its own sake rather than to provide a backdrop for a focal feature or features.<sup>40</sup> There is no village square or great cathedral, and the Gooderham estate is off in a corner and largely concealed by mature trees. In a presentation to councillors in 1973 village residents concerned with beautification of the village suggested that “where architectural considerations apply, a black and white colour scheme be maintained.”<sup>41</sup> That just about sums it up. A monochromatic Meadowvale underscores its vernacular character—truly ‘of the people’—yet seems oddly contrary to the spirit in watercolour and oil that artists had given the village. For a number of years I ran a geography field course in

Meadowvale, and invited students to walk through the streets looking, sketching, and absorbing. So often they discovered the pleasures in ordinary things: a tooled stone lintel, clapboard siding here and shiplap there, bits of rail fencing, a tiny window squeezed under an end gable, a surveyor’s bench mark in the church wall. They asked questions about ditches, tree-lines, street names and much, much more. They pieced together the story of a block of concrete half-buried in an embankment where the Silverthorn mill once had stood, and became committed to its continued presence. (Figure 11) Do-gooders who would remove such apparent ruins would call it ‘tidying,’ quite oblivious to the fact that ruins tell stories and are good for a healthy vernacular landscape.<sup>42</sup> Recognizing them is the essence of the HCD designation.

The Mississauga LACAC was among the first in the province to recognize ‘ver-

<sup>40</sup> Lickiss, “Village Conservation,” 36.

<sup>41</sup> Guerts, “Brief,” 5<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> J.B. Jackson, *The Necessity for Ruins*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980).

nacular' as an asset and take up the conservation district challenge in its support. With it would come 7067 Pond Street and a coherent scatter of other ordinary buildings and vistas, all threatened with the tsunami of suburbanization about to wash across old rural Toronto Township. By 2012 that wave has passed and Meadowvale village had stood up to the assault, working-class housing and all. Acting under the Her-

itage Act umbrella, an intellectual elite has conserved a working-class landscape that working-class people are not likely to have seen as a priority during their lifetimes in that place. Few would think of Meadowvale today as working-class in the traditional, blue-collar sense of that term. The village has become an upscale suburban neighbourhood. Houses and streets once considered out-of-touch are in demand, competing on the real estate market as intriguing options for the discerning citizen seeking something rather different from the homogeneous suburban tracts that dominate Mississauga. Working-class housing has become fashionable in a tony neighbourhood.

The Credit River defines the hypotenuse of this triangular hamlet, and is a



*FIGURE 11. This pillar of poured concrete bears the imprint of a beam and foundation stones in the Silverthorn Mill, torn down in 1954. It is a memorial to the founding of this industrial village more than 160 years ago, and was still standing in 2012. (Author photo)*

al and aesthetic presence.<sup>43</sup> The Credit is the reason for Meadowvale being where it is, founded on the power that its flowing waters provided. The finest approach to the village is to be from the west, across the river, with the village snuggling among the trees on the east side in an inviting rural sort of way.

Establishing the easterly and southerly limits of the HCD was, likewise, not particularly challenging. Meadowvale village is compact, and beyond the last house spread open farmland. With developers and city council eyeing those fields as prime places for subdivision, and city planners and village residents knowing full well that there were practical limits to the HCD concept, attempts to extend outward further made little sense. The

natural boundary for the HCD. Its flood plain is off limits to development and gives a timeless soft edge to the old village. (Figure 12) The river takes control of the tension between an arbitrary grid survey and local physiography, and contributes immeasurably to the village's sense of place. The Credit is not formally part of the Heritage Conservation District, but clearly it has an enormous visu-

<sup>43</sup> Incorporating floodplain lands into the Heritage Conservation District is an option for consideration by the HCD review in 2012. HCD Plan Review, 78.



*FIGURE 12. Meadowvale village is at its most rural-looking as one approaches from the west. An ice-jam in January 1973 dramatizes the role of the river and its floodplain as recreational green space out of reach to suburban development. (Author photo)*



one questionable limit was Second Line south from the community hall, along which extended that straggle of mainly builder-built houses on odd-sized lots severed from adjacent farms between the 1920s and the 1960s. Second Line south was an unplanned continuation of the incremental evolution of the older village, but was ignored by heritage interests. In 1980 it simply did not meet HCD expectations.

Creation of the Meadowvale Heritage Conservation District was a triumph, yet there were still anxieties. Decision on the routing of the bypass roads, reached about 1985, was a huge relief, and it is no coincidence that 7067 Pond Street underwent its renovation only after these arrangements seemed assured. Village survival was being affirmed. But what of the residential subdivisions scheduled for construction in the 1990s south and east of the HCD? Would they smother it? Would new-house designers be disdainful of aesthetics? Would their houses be of sufficient value to enhance the worth of the village? The secondary plan had originally called for a buffer of open space

of 1.6 km in all directions.<sup>44</sup> This was unrealistic, except on the river side, and village residents fretted about breathing room. As it turned out, schoolyards to the east and parkland behind the Bell Hotel did give valuable visual distance, and the HCD has not been overwhelmed.

Such questions did, nevertheless, keep villagers on their guard. Once again they become involved, this time in the subdivision design process, with results that were both enlightening and intriguing. The goal was for Meadowvale and the immediately adjacent development lands to form a coherent unit, with the village and its new neighbours living comfortably, at least in a visual sense (and, ideally, socially), in each other's presence. Discussions with landscapers and developers led to formalized design criteria, to be applied in a succession of layers spreading outward from the Heritage Conservation District. (Figure 9) The inner layer, dubbed by

<sup>44</sup> Lickiss, "Village Conservation," 35.



FIGURE 13. A Monarch Home, freshly built and landscaped, in the Village Character Area, December 1998. (Author photo)

planners as the Village Character Area, was generally one or two streets deep, and buildings there were to incorporate ‘heritage elements’ in a persuasively overt manner. Beyond this zone was the Extended Village Character Area. Here the sense of heritage was to be more subdued, and at its outer limits was to blend seamlessly into the suburban city further afield.<sup>45</sup>

Developers and their architects bought into the idea. Take a builder versed in 1990s-style house design and sit him or her down with Tony Adamson’s *The Gaiety of Gables* or Douglas Richardson’s *Ontario Towns*.<sup>46</sup> Now walk along Gaslamp Lane, across from the Gooderham estate, and see their response. Polychromatic red-and-buff brick walls, steep gingerbreaded gables with finials, and gothic windows; garages were concealed behind and, in one case, accessible

through a back lane. Monarch Development Corporation built 525 houses between 1997 and 2001 along Gaslamp Lane and beyond. Their publicity spoke of “brick detailing, quoining, gingerbread trim, board and batten exterior paneling”—the aspects passers-by would see—but also of “high ceilings, in-home offices, art niches, rounded corner beads and key-hole arches” inside.<sup>47</sup> (Figure 13) Clearly this was upscale design intended to complement (although not necessarily echo) Meadowvale village. These houses were not built for members of the traditional working-class, but one might say that they offer advantages for the emergent at-home-working class. Naming was a further, and inexpensive, way of meeting heritage aspirations. House design names such as The Silverthorn and The Lessard is a nice touch, recognizing important villagers from the past. It risked being excessive, however, and for a new family to announce that they were moving to the corner of Haines Artist Way and Elliott Parliament Street would surely give the listener pause.

More than any other detail, it is the

<sup>45</sup> Village Character Area and Extended Village Character Area are explained in “Meadowvale Village Secondary Plan,” (City of Mississauga, Planning and Building Department, January 1996), sections 3.3.1.2 and 3.3.1.3, pages 22-24, and mapped on Schedule 6.

<sup>46</sup> Anthony Adamson and John Willard, *The Gaiety of Gables*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974); Ralph Greenhill, Ken Macpherson, and Douglas S Richardson, *Ontario Towns*. (Toronto: Oberon Press, 1974).

<sup>47</sup> Monarch Homes brochure, quoted in Hicks, *Meadowvale*, 211.



FIGURE 14. Gothicism and steep gables prevail in the Extended Village Character area. (Author photo)

Gothic window that defines the Character and Extended Character areas. (Figure 14) “What hath LACAC wrought?” one might ask, but in fact this response is exactly what should have happened. Silverthorn (or an early successor) did it to 7050 Old Mill Lane in Meadowvale’s nascent years (Figure 3), so what’s new? Gothic detail is vernacular Ontario, here in its 1990s style, with ordinary tract builders doing what they thought was right. They have taken their cue from Ontario’s heritage movement of the past half century. Gothic windows are strongly associated with Ontario farmhouses, so they may in fact be considered working-class features, now boldly commemorated in the extended Meadowvale suburban setting.<sup>48</sup> These outliers of the Meadowvale HCD are part of the n<sup>th</sup>

Gothic Revival since medieval times, and are already taking their place in the Meadowvale continuity.

In the pre-District days, about 1970 and well before procedures were monitored, a small non-descript frame house on Old Mill Lane was enlarged by the expedient of placing a mansarded second storey on top of the ground-level storey. It gave the house a decidedly top-heavy effect, and was considered an outrage at the time. The house has long since mellowed and should now be recognized for telling its story of well-intentional functionality, even if the effect is somewhat bizarre. But have we not had follies throughout history, and accepted them as part of the landscape? The Village Review Committee would no doubt challenge such a remodelling today, but what a useful

<sup>48</sup> Thomas F. McIlwraith. *Looking for Old Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 153.



conversation piece, and how clearly a rallying-point for residents in the 1970s seeking to express their opinions regarding change to the fabric of their village.

Meadowvale village is not a destination resort. There is no tourism initiative here, only a low-key example of creative city planning and the support of community volunteers. The HCD works because change occurs slowly and initiatives are thoughtfully monitored by the Village Review Committee from the earliest whispering over the back fence on a Monday morning. This body traces its roots to the Meadowvale Village Community Association of 1969 and functions as a subcommittee of the Mississauga Heritage Board (successor name to the LACAC). The review committee is chaired by long-time villager and HCD enthusiast Jim Holmes and includes two other villagers, a Heritage Board member and a member of the City Planning Board staff. It vets all proposals for construction and change in the context of site planning stipulations, as required by the legislation. These instructions—setbacks, heights, materials, space, etc.—would have been unnecessary for working people 150 years ago, but current residents, with different priorities, have to be coached on what is acceptable. Steady vigilance by the Review

Committee has served villagers and the city admirably, and it is a good example of sensitive civic activism.

The future is always a concern when volunteers are involved. When Jim and Pat Holmes finally stow their clipboards, who will carry on? What are the pressures for other uses? Will citizens in future decades be as inclined to celebrate 7067 Pond Street as were their predecessors in the 1980s? Revision of the Heritage Act of 2005 has rendered some aspects of the Meadowvale HCD obsolete, prompting the city in 2012 to undertake the review, cited frequently in this report, and to conduct further reviews every five or seven years.<sup>49</sup> This is a commendable initiative, showing yet another aspect of continuity in Meadowvale. The idea of doubling the size of the HCD to include a large section of the Credit River and its floodplain reinforces the place of waterpower in the industrial heritage that gave Meadowvale its base. Concurrent plans to recommend that the Credit River be included in the Canadian Heritage Rivers System is a sensible complementary activity, and would cap off efforts to bring the river back to health from a low point in the 1950s, when pollutants from farm runoff upstream made it almost unusable.<sup>50</sup> The survival of old Meadowvale should never be taken for

<sup>49</sup> Revised Statutes of Ontario 1990, Cap O 18, and subsequent amendments. The draft of the report was released as this essay was in final preparation, under the title “Meadowvale Village Heritage Conservation District Plan Review,” (Cultural Division, Community Services, City of Mississauga, October 2012), typescript, 82 pages.

<sup>50</sup> The Canadian Heritage Rivers System was established in 1986. For background on the Credit River water quality see Robert Turnbull, *Crisis on the Credit* (Toronto: *The Globe and Mail*, 1963). The last salmon run reported on the River occurred in 1841. Restoration by the Credit Valley Conservation Authority (CVCA) began in 1969. See “Towards a natural heritage system for the Credit River watershed.” (CVCA, June 2011).



granted, and recognition of the river will be a fine endorsement of the HCD initiative.

Another sign of Meadowvale's health is that people want to live there and enjoy its distinctive ambience. The small village feeling has momentum. As long as people build new houses in re-

called styles as the old ones succumb to age, neglect, or fire, the concept of a village is unlikely to fade. One resident has gone to the extraordinary length of moving a frame house more than 50 km from a vulnerable site in Richmond Hill to a vacant lot at the corner of Barberry Lane and Pond Street in 1998. (Figure 15) Once it was landscaped and settled, this 1830s-era dwelling looked as if it had always been there, and indeed it could have been. It nicely complements and enriches the earliest images of the village, and could have been a working-man's dwelling. Log and timber frame buildings were built to be moved, and often did so as farmland was cleared and wells were dug, so there is nothing particularly inauthentic about this procedure. This is just one of the many remarkable Meadowvale stories, and recalls the comment made in 1973



FIGURE 15. This house stood on a vulnerable site more than 50 km distant. In 1998 it was moved to a perceived safe haven in Meadowvale HCD. Finished in a light stucco and the site landscaped, this has become an integral element of the village fabric. (December, 1998. Author photo)

in 1980 it was too fresh to be of heritage interest yet just old enough to look 'dated.' In the 1990s it was placed in the Village Character Area, perhaps by default, and certainly having had its own character established long before subdivisions started being built on either side of it. (Figure 9) An anomaly and left aside from the heritage mix, Second Line south has followed its own informal course, and by 2012 has been largely rebuilt, house by house and lot by lot. It looks like small-time activity, with much local input, and monster homes may seem to resemble in scale and design little of the spirit of old Meadowvale or its spin-offs. Still, its vernacular evolution may be closer to the tone of the old village than one would think. Viewed from the second decade of the twenty-first century the Second Line south could arguably be considered a part

by villagers about authenticity.<sup>51</sup> Nearby stands a blacksmith shop restored as a coach house, and that, too, is "a story to be told."<sup>52</sup> Meadowvale is not only a landscape but also a source of memories and stories triggered by its setting.

As for Second Line south,

<sup>51</sup> Guerts, "Brief," 3<sup>rd</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> Siobhan Kukolic, "A little, mature hamlet that survived the growth happening around it over the years." *Mississauga News*, 14 September 2011, 5.



FIGURE 16. In September 2011 Old Meadowvale celebrated the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its supposed founding in 1836. Equally fitting would be a celebration of the very existence of this special entity in the fabric of the City of Mississauga. (Author photo)

of old Meadowvale. Both places built up and changed step by step. It may take a generation or more for locals to appreciate its significance, but I would venture that the Heritage Conservation District, the Village Character Area, and the Extended Village Character Area will grow together. Their boundaries and contrast may well diminish into a seamless mass that will sustain the sense of generation upon generation of the use of city space. A sympathetic rind embracing the designated core may be the next step on the path to an enlarged conservation district.

Old Meadowvale residents can be defensive of what they have come to cherish. They have embraced adaptability rather than destruction. Far from going against the flow, they have hitched on to a very current tide, and opposition makes for testiness. On occasion Review Committee members have had to don their best hair shirts to deal with an insensitive proposal, even leading to disgruntled owners selling up and moving off. Some long-timers may look askance as a youthful suburbanite from Crawford Mill Blvd. jogs along Bar-

berry Lane pushing a baby stroller and keeping up with the family dog. On the other hand, on Sunday mornings Koreans drive in from miles around to attend service in their United (formerly Methodist) Church sanctuary,

and are welcomed to linger in the village afterwards. (Figure 9) For them, Meadowvale offers a sanctuary within a sanctuary, and barriers may not be high.

It is instructive that recognition of a working-class community has been achieved by a mixture of determined insiders and sympathetic outsiders, both parties carrying in varying degrees a romantic image of a bygone world of which they probably would not wish to be a part. Heritage conservationists are happy to recall many a less-than-appealing place in a sanitized way. The idea of gentrification of a vernacular setting is almost contradictory, but the action may be the price for the pleasure of having such a place as old Meadowvale village in our midst in the twenty-first century. In the end, Meadowvale shines through as simply an ordinary place with a somewhat surprising story to tell. It is where regular people do common-place things: work and play, raise children, and retire. That is what Meadowvale was like when the double cottage at 7067 Pond Street was built for Silverthorn's workers in 1856. *Plus ça change ...*