

Whiskey and the railroads changed closeknit towns in Brock Township

Community Mar 30, 2018 by Larry Doble, president of the Sunderland and District Historical Society Brock Citizen



Railroads, starting with the Grand Trunk from Toronto to Montreal in 1856, were built through the rural Scarborough Township, concentrating most residents in villages such as Scarborough Junction, seen in this undated photo, and bringing farm goods to nearby Toronto. - Scarborough Archives

There was a time in rural Ontario when communities were isolated and very self reliant.

In a time before highways, cars and trains, your social boundaries were likely limited to a half-day buggy or sleigh ride to see neighbours and friends. Certain times of the year in the spring and fall roads were impassable.

Because of travel difficulties, small towns had citizens who permanently filled every niche. Barbers were often tailors; furniture makers were also undertakers; bakers ran a bulk food store with an ice cream parlour.

People came to town on a Saturday to buy local products from merchants or head over to the farmers market in the old town hall to buy all manner of beast and produce.

RELATED CONTENT



[How did our ancestors end up where they did?](#)

Families had lived in the area for generations and had links to numerous relatives and friends. The early social network was the church and families had members in the band, choir or on various committees.

Children walked to school and often there were up to eight grades in one classroom. Relatives communicated back and forth with inexpensive postcards. Stamps cost one cent to Canada or the U.S.A. or a whopping two cents if you sent it to another foreign country.

About 1868, there was a dramatic change in this rural setting due to a surprising product — whiskey.

The Toronto Nipissing Railway was built to link the Toronto Distillery District to the woodlands around Coboconk. The timber in that area was needed as a vital component in the brewing process.

The train went from the shores of Lake Ontario up through Scarborough, Unionville, Uxbridge, Marsh Hill, Blackwater, Sunderland, Cannington, Lorneville, Eldon, Kirkfield and Coboconk.

Towns on the new railway link prospered and those on the outskirts became ghost towns.