

Brock House Hotel has a storied history

COMMUNITY Mar 02, 2011 Peterborough This Week



- Larry Doble

For more than 100 years, Brock House has been the site for the celebration of several special events and has been a vital part of the history of the area. For example, in 1945, a banquet was held here to honor the veterans from both World Wars.

Over the years, the building has provided a variety of useful purposes for the community of Sunderland.

The original Brock House Hotel was built of logs about 1840 when Sunderland was known as Jones' Corner.

Archibald and Lorenzo Jones owned 200 acres of land at lot 12, concession 5, south of River Street on the map of Brock Township in 1860. That land went from the location of the new fire hall east to Highway 12 and south to the 5th concession of Brock. It took in most of the southern part of Sunderland below of River Street

They also developed the plan for building lots about the same time the Toronto Nipissing Railroad came through town about 1868. At that time the hotel was in a perfect location as travelers would come north on what is now Albert Street into Sunderland to River Street and then make a right turn and head east to reach Highway 12 going north. There was no way that they could bypass the hotel.

In the Directory of Ontario County for 1869, Lorenzo Jones was the hotel keeper. Many locations used the term Brock in honor of Sir Isaac Brock who won many battles in the war of 1812 against the United States. He was killed at the Battle of Queenston Heights while leading a charge up the hill to recover the captured British artillery.

The hotel had many owners over the next 88 years.

In the Atlas of Ontario for 1877, a map of Sunderland shows that the hotel was run by J.C. Campbell.

These wooden buildings were in constant danger of burning down as oil lamps were used for lighting and there was no fire department capable of putting out a large fire. In 1899, when Jack Macdonald was managing the hotel, it burned to the ground.

Mrs. Albert Campbell then sold the property to a Dr. McDermott. He organized and financed the construction of a three-story brick building in 1910. This location at River and Main Street (later called Albert) was a wonderful spot for a meal and lodging but the bylaw of 1904 made it illegal to serve alcohol in "dry" Sunderland.

A.W. Hamilton was the hotel keeper from 1904 to 1911. Other owners of the hotel were Mr. Gunn, William Pangman, Jim Thompson and Sam Ainsworth. Sam bought the hotel from Brock Township in 1927.

George Shier ran the hotel from 1944 to 1965. During the great fire of 1949, he was on the roof of the hotel as part of a bucket brigade putting out the embers from the burning McDermott Block across the street.

In 1966, the Ontario Government bought the building and created the Sunnydale Home for Children. This facility cared for up to 77 children and employed as many as 60 staff members. After 23 years, the site was closed and the residents moved into smaller group homes.

Later the building was renovated and turned into a seniors' home. Today, with new owners in the last few years, the building is called Victoria Manor Retirement Residence.

Larry Doble is president of the Sunderland Historical Society. He thanks Jack Gordon for the information in his book "The Green Pastures of Old Brock" which provided some of this background material.