

## Village Essay 2

### An Isolated Township

<https://www.oakville.ca/culturerec/village-essay2.html>

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Early on in the settlement of Upper Canada concession roads were constructed by settlers as part of the legal duties that were part of their ownership of the land; in other cases, the local or provincial governments assisted in road building. In Trafalgar Township one such road was the 7th Line (now Trafalgar Road) running north from Oakville for forty miles, passing through Garafraxa Township, Esquesing Township, and Erin Township. Further north, the 7th Line continued all the way into the Bruce peninsula and Owen Sound. <sup>1</sup> All Upper Canadian roads were rudimentary dirt roads, constructed piecemeal by the settlers, and treacherous during bad weather. Nevertheless, at the same time, they were absolutely essential to connect the scattered towns throughout the region. Without them the transfer of goods and people between outposts would have been impossible.

In the matter of the local roads in Oakville, William Chisholm was responsible for arranging to build and maintaining those on his property. In 1831 the House of Assembly appropriated funds for a road from Post's Inn at the south-west corner of the 7th Line and Dundas Street to Oakville. <sup>2</sup> The £25 appropriated in 1831 by the House of Assembly for the road "from Post's Inn in Trafalgar to Oakville" might be considered a sign that the 7th itself was a new road. In other words, the 7th was a "given road" or one opened at a later date upon petition of the freeholders in the area rather than the government's surveyed roads. <sup>3</sup> It was also proposed that a road should be built from Munn's Corners at the 6th Line and Dundas Street south to Oakville. These connections "would enable settlers from the north to travel directly to the Oakville mills and the harbour at Oakville". <sup>4</sup> Today the 6th and the 7th Lines meet at the corner of Old Mill Road and Trafalgar Road. By enabling the 6th and 7th Lines to merge, "traffic was brought to the mills and the harbour by the shortest route". <sup>5</sup>

Large changes were on the horizon for travel in Upper Canada. With the Great Migration from the British Isles in the 1830s, settlement was moving many miles inland and the result was the development of new townships to the north. By the 1840s the volume of traffic was such that the 7th Line was in dire need of improvement. There was a need for local north/south roads to be improved as well. The more farmers' fields were producing, the more wheat and produce had to be brought to market. Taverns and blacksmiths shops sprung up along the length of the 7th Line to accommodate these travellers.

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The township's concerns in this regard culminated in the creation of the Trafalgar, Esquesing and Erin Road Company in 1846 to cover the 7th Line with wooden planks.<sup>6</sup> The effort was truly a local affair including Squire Appelbe as president and R.K. Chisholm as secretary-treasurer and the company's headquarters were located in the Oakville Post Office.<sup>7</sup> The estimated cost given by Robert W. Kerr for just a nineteen-mile piece of the road came to an overwhelming £14,411/14/0 for a twenty foot wide planked road. Some of the enormous costs were defrayed by the erection of the company's own sawmill, however the whole project was still very costly.<sup>8</sup> The Company would eventually create a planked road that stretched sixty miles from Oakville to Fergus, Ont. Today, the road ends near the northern limits of Trafalgar Township. Other planked roads were to follow, but they lasted only a few years before having to be replaced.<sup>9</sup> The 7th Line was no exception.

The Road Company petitioned the County Council in 1858 to "relinquish its claim on the loan of £3000, stating that because of the perishable material of which the road was constructed it had become almost unserviceable and that the company was unable to reconstruct it." The solution was to remove the planking; the 7th Line within a matter of months had reverted back to a dirt road.<sup>10</sup>

Over the next decade the roads deteriorated drastically. With the introduction of the railroads north of the centre of the town, there was little use for the county roads that were once the north-south routes to the port. The maintenance "of the roads leading to the ports was considered more of a burden than a benefit." A gentleman of the time commented that "the best plan seemed to be 'to abandon them and allow cattle to roam over them'".<sup>11</sup>

It seems no further improvements were made to the roads for several decades. Photographs of Oakville from late in the nineteenth century show some planked sidewalks, but also dirt roads. Just after this time the town council agreed that the sidewalks, at least, would be paved in 'granolithic', the original name for cement, at the cost of 12½¢ per square foot. The majority of the town was paved for under \$8,000 dollars.<sup>12</sup> Full road pavement did not come until after the First World War and on into the 1920s.

Today the Trafalgar Road is a scenic route with its heritage houses on one side and the Sixteen Mile Creek on the other. The fact that it was a road with historical purpose and importance is often lost on its current travellers. Even as a dirt road for much of its existence, as a link between farmers, the mill and the harbour they needed to grind and transport their wheat, it was an invaluable part of the community in and around Oakville for the majority of the town's years as a farming community.

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### **Bibliography**

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Mathews, Hazel C., *Oakville and the Sixteen: The History of an Ontario Port*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1953

### **Footnotes**

1. Hazel C. Mathews, *Oakville and the Sixteen: The History of an Ontario Port*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1953) p. 165, 192
2. Philip Brimacombe, *The Story of Oakville Harbour* (Cheltenham ON: Boston Mills Press, 1975)
3. Hazel C. Mathews, *Oakville and the Sixteen: The History of an Ontario Port* pp. 45-46
4. Philip Brimacombe, *The Story of Oakville Harbour*
5. Hazel C. Mathews, *Oakville and the Sixteen: The History of an Ontario Port*, p. 193
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., pp. 193-194
9. Ibid., pp. 193, 197
10. Hazel C. Mathews, *Oakville and the Sixteen: The History of an Ontario Port*, p. 197
11. Ibid., p. 335
12. Ibid., p. 430