



Waterdown at the Turn of the 19th century

- Part of the territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, the region is covered by Treaty No.3 (1792).
- First settled by non-Indigenous People in 1805¹, Waterdown was founded by Ebenezer Griffin in 1830 (the year he had the area surveyed into village lots). Waterdown was incorporated as its own municipality on June 5th, 1878 (this would last until 1974).
- The population of Waterdown in 1900-1910 was around 800 people.
- By 1890, the village was a bustling industrial hub centred around Grindstone Creek. Smokey Hollow, a local dale, was the site of various mills and factories –17 buildings were clustered there (the resulting pollution giving the area its name “Smokey Hollow”). Smokey Hollow and Grindstone Creek declined as centres of industry due to fires and the diversion of water from the creek (for agricultural purposes) after 1910, and most of Waterdown’s mills were closed by 1915.
- Stone was quarried from sites around the village (modern day Memorial Park, “The View” condominiums, and behind Walmart) and sent across the country. Some of the stone quarried from Waterdown was used to build King’s College at the University of Toronto.
- Common causes of death were industrial accidents, including being cut by saws in the wood mills – John C. Slater was killed this way in 1910.
- Hydroelectricity came to the village in 1911. The first telephone was located above the bank (present-day Pickwicks).
- The Waterdown Public and Continuation School (now Waterdown District High School) was located at Sealey Park – the first floor of one of the buildings survives as Scout Hall.
- Village time was marked by a Bell House, located on the site of present-day Memorial Hall (the bell can be found mounted in front of the hall). The bell in the tower was rung at 7 a.m., noon, 1 p.m. and 6 p.m.
- The first passenger train arrived in the village on July 1st, 1912 offering – at its peak – nine daily trains between Waterdown and Hamilton, bringing 6000 visitors a month. The train station was located near the Dundas Street Bridge (east of the intersection of Mill and Dundas Street).

¹ Alexander Brown and Merren Grierson are credited with being the first Europeans to settle in the area.

- Major fires caused extensive damage in the village – the most devastating being the Great Fire of May 23rd, 1922, which destroyed everything between the American House and The Royal Coachman.
- One of the key figures in the village was Dr. John Owen McGregor (1850-1928). A medical doctor and politician, McGregor’s home – called “The Clunes” – located at 49 Main Street² was the centre of the village’s social life. McGregor was elected reeve of Waterdown in 1895 and served on the village council for 16 years.



Map showing the approximate size of Waterdown in 1900.



The Union Jack would be flying on any village government buildings, including the school.

Sources: *The Extraordinary History of Flamborough: East Flamborough, West Flamborough and Waterdown* (Waterdown: The Flamborough Heritage Society, 2017)

The Flamborough Archives (Waterdown Library)

² It’s still there and is now called “McGregor House.”