

Section 6: Heritage Apple Orchard

History

Start this audio as we approach the crosswalk that we crossed at the beginning of the tour, to the left is a woodlot area, stop here.

As we make our way back toward the Student Welcome and Resource Centre, let's turn our attention towards the heritage apple orchard that we passed at the beginning of the tour. This orchard is a significant agricultural relic of the property, recognized as a heritage location due to its two intact areas of apple trees. These trees stand in their original 19th-century alignment preserving the spatial evidence of its formation.

Originally farmed by Hugh McNeil, the orchard became a part of Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital's property around 1903. The first photographic evidence of the orchard dates back to an 1878 map of the Township of York, where it was located on land belonging to Hugh J and R McNeil. By around 1910, approximately seven years later, after the hospital took ownership, angled photos show the orchard's existence. In 1921, Dr. Beemer, the hospital's superintendent noted the orchard's struggle to meet the institution's apple needs:

The apple crop has never been equal to the needs of the patients, but this is somewhat due to the mistaken view of a former farm director that the soil and climate at this place are unfavorable to the growth of apples.

Despite Toronto's fertile soil, aerial images over subsequent years indicate the orchard was never expanded beyond its original boundaries. By the mid-1990s, neglect and the removal of trees led to the sparse remnants we see today, likely over 100 years old. The orchard once extended to where the Holy Trinity Catholic School now stands, but those trees have since been

removed. Although the orchard didn't officially extend to where the Student Welcome and Resource Centre is, trees were cut down for this build. Prior to their removal, Humber Elder and Advisor Shelley Charles recognized the contribution of the trees to the land. The wood was made into seating cubes and pedestals, which were designed and built by Humber's woodworking program and can be found throughout the building.

Heritage trees like those in this orchard preserve important genetic material and cultural history. While none of the apple varieties present are recognized as significant heritage varieties according to expert assessments, the orchard remains a crucial testament to the hospital's fruit farming history and deserves preservation. Over the years, efforts by Humber College arborist students in the early 1990s contributed to its maintenance. Humber still has an arborist apprenticeship program today, located at their North Campus. It focuses on urban forestry maintenance and makes use of the wonderful "learning classroom" that is Humber Arboretum.

Call to Action

The orchard at Lakeshore Grounds is at a pivotal moment. With the trees aging, there's a unique opportunity to preserve their historical legacy by grafting old varieties onto new rootstocks. This restoration project is a collaborative effort between Humber College, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, and the City of Toronto.

Imagine the future of this space: Should it become a cultural gathering place for community events and educational programs? Could it be a tranquil retreat for reflection and recreation? Or should it remain untouched to allow nature to take its course? Your input is vital in shaping the future of this orchard. What do you see as the best way to honor its legacy and ensure it thrives for generations to come? Please share your thoughts in the survey provided on our website.

Conclusion

As we conclude our tour, I hope you've gained a deeper appreciation for Lakeshore Grounds and Colonel Samuel Smith Park. From Indigenous stewardship to modern restoration efforts, this park tells a story of resilience and adaptation.

We've explored diverse ecosystems and witnessed the park's commitment to preserving natural beauty and ecological health. The proposed restoration of the heritage apple orchard is a testament to our collective responsibility to honor and preserve our history while fostering a sustainable environment.

Reflect on today's tour and consider how you can contribute to the ongoing story of this park. Whether through volunteering, participating in community events, or simply enjoying its natural beauty, each of us has a role to play in its preservation. Please share your vision for the future of the orchard by filling out the survey provided on our website.

Thank you for joining me today. Together, we can ensure Lakeshore Grounds remains a cherished part of our community for generations to come.