

Cheltenham residents mark village's bicentennial with day of fun

By Zachary Roman

Bicentennial celebrations have been taking place all across Caledon this summer, and more are on the way, such as the Caledon East bicentennial celebration that's taking place this Saturday.

Before Caledon East's bicentennial takes place this weekend, The Citizen spoke to a member of the Cheltenham Area Residents Association (CARA) to discuss Cheltenham's bicentennial celebration, which occurred earlier this summer.

Holly Monkman, CARA's secretary, worked to combine bicentennial celebrations with Cheltenham's famous Cheltenham Day event on July 9.

"I was doing the communication with the heritage group and town crier," Monkman explained. "When I saw the (history) display board, it was huge for how small our little village is, it was a lot."

To mark the bicentennial, Mayor Allan Thompson and Town Crier Andrew Welch attended a plaque unveiling ceremony at the Beryl Bland Parkette. The Sandhill Pipes and Drums played for those in attendance, and cookies and cupcakes were served. Posters detailing the history of Cheltenham were displayed so people could learn about the history of their village. Other fun activities took place throughout the day for Cheltenham day, such as street hockey, a tube race, and a duck race.

"We revealed the plaque" then all the kids were welcomed into the park and we had bouncy castles and prizes and games and bubbles and stuff for them to do there," said Monkman. "While that was going on, there was also a street sale" and the fire department did a barbecue."

The fire department was also involved in the bike parade that happened at the start of the day, where kids from Cheltenham rode behind a fire truck through the village. Cheltenham Day also included live music, a silent auction, a beer garden, and more.

Cheltenham, much like Caledon's other villages and hamlets, is situated on land that has been occupied and used for millennia by Indigenous peoples, including the Huron-Wendat and Haudenosaunee. It's situated in the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, which was acquired by the British in October 1818.

The first settler to live in what's now Cheltenham was British immigrant Charles Haines. After attending a land fair in York in 1820 to seek a mill site, he was granted 100 acres split in half by the Credit River in Chinguacousy Township. He cut through the bush to get there with his nine-year-old son, and built a log shanty on the land. Two years later, in 1822, Haines' wife and the rest of his children moved there too.

By 1827, Haines' mill was in operation, and it provided flour for his growing family and settlers in the surrounding area. The mill was accessed by a riverside trail that's now Mill Street, and the mill became a focal point for development in the area.

In 1842, Haines' son Frederick opened a store, and in 1845 a man named Charles Spencer opened a tavern. Both of these businesses were on Creditview Road, which became Cheltenham's commercial core.

Haines upgraded his mill in 1847 using lumber from his son Ebenezer's sawmill. He called the upgraded mill the Cheltenham Mill, after his birthplace, and the name was adopted by the community. Cheltenham would grow rapidly in the coming years, becoming one of the largest wheat-producing Townships. Six short years later, Cheltenham had three hotels, a post office, blacksmith, schoolhouse, general store, church, druggist, and more.

Railways that were routed near Cheltenham helped the village grow, as grain production could increase. But in 1887, disaster struck:

a fire destroyed much of Cheltenham's commercial block. Residents learned from this, and important buildings were rebuilt with stone and brick, some of which are still standing to this day.

Fast-forward to 1900, and Cheltenham's main agricultural focus had shifted to dairy production from wheat production. In 1914, the Cheltenham Brickworks was opened, providing another boost to Cheltenham's economy. It was in business until the late 1950s. Many of Cheltenham's early homes and commercial buildings are still standing today, and the village continues to thrive in the beautiful Credit River valley.