



# Historic Walking Tour

The Town of Gravenhurst Heritage Walking Tour is designed with reference to material from previous walking tours and the texts listed below. Although we strive for accuracy, we are unable to verify all information. If you would like to learn more about the Town of Gravenhurst please consult these local historical references at the Public Library. Both are unfortunately out of print.

**The Light of Other Days** Gravenhurst Historical Committee. Cobourg: Haynes Printing Co., 1972

**Gravenhurst: An Album of Memories and Mysteries** Gravenhurst Book Committee, Gravenhurst, 1993.

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Watts Printing Rev. 2/10

Gravenhurst is the Gateway to the Muskoka Lakes. First settled in 1861, it soon gained prominence, first as a transshipment centre from stages to steamboats and later as a major lumber town and boat building centre. Today it caters to tourists and cottagers. The population of our community is approximately 11,500.

The Gravenhurst Heritage Walking Tour is brought to you by the Gravenhurst Chamber of Commerce and the Gravenhurst Municipal Heritage Committee.

Financial support for this project has been provided by the following partners:



**1 Albion Hotel ~ 100 Muskoka Road North**

The original Albion Hotel was a frame building built by Frank Wasley in 1879. It perished in the Great Fire of 1887. The present hotel rose the following year with "pleasant parlors, a spacious dining room and well-equipped bar". Notice the brickwork and window detail. In the late 1980s the exterior was restored and the interior converted to apartments and business premises. Travelers must now seek accommodation elsewhere but they can still quench their thirst at the Albion.



**2 Post Office ~ 101 Muskoka Road North**

This was the original site of Dugald Brown's Steamboat and Stage House which became the Fraser House and later David Lafreniere's hotel. It was lost in the Great Fire of 1887 and the Windsor Hotel



was built in its place but likewise burned down in 1903. The current Post Office was built in 1926. The second storey and clock tower were added in 1935.

**3 St. James Anglican Church ~ 191 Hotchkiss Street**

The first Anglican church on the site was destroyed in the 1887 Great Fire. A new one was rebuilt of brick this time and consecrated in 1888. Architect F.A. Fowler is credited with its design. Since 1889 the belfry has been home to a 701 pound bell.



**4 Sloan's Restaurant ~ 155 Muskoka Road South**



Sloan's has been a town landmark and social centre for years. Archie and Sarah Sloan opened it as a confectionery and ice cream parlour in 1915. Their son Gordon took over the business in 1930 and undertook a major renovation in 1947,

incorporating the grocery store next door. Sloan's Restaurant was known as a favourite meeting place. It still operates at the same location under new management but is now known as the Cottage Ville Inn.

**5 Carnegie Library ~ 275 Muskoka Road South**



Scottish born philanthropist and steel magnate Andrew Carnegie established a foundation which funded the building of public libraries in communities across North America.

Gravenhurst made late application but nonetheless witnessed the opening of its own Carnegie Library in 1923. It was enlarged in 1975 and has since been designated a heritage structure by the Town. A statue of Norman Bethune funded by the Town stands out front. It was unveiled by Governor General Adrienne Clarkson in 2000.

**6 Opera House ~ 295 Muskoka Road South**

Now designated an historic building by the Town, the red brick Opera House was built in 1901. It was originally intended to house the town offices, council chambers and magistrates court in addition to entertainment. Since 1947 professional concerts have been presented year round, enhanced by superior acoustics. It was restored and enlarged in 1972. The parking lot at the back was a bowling green until 1940. It is fronted by the Opera House Square which includes the cenotaph.



**7 Gilmour Hotel ~ 310 Muskoka Road South**

James Sharpe opened the Caledonian Hotel here in 1881, only to see it destroyed by the fire of 1887. In 1888 the hotel was reconstructed as the Empress, with 30 to 40 rooms. James Gilmour bought the building in 1906, only to sell it and move away shortly after. He returned in 1916 and re-purchased the hotel, naming it the Gilmour. The hotel and its name continued under various owners until the mid 1980s. In 1987 it was converted into offices.



**8 Railway Station ~ 150 Second Street**

This historic railway station was built in 1919 and opened by Edward Prince of Wales, who later became King Edward VIII. It replaced the earlier Grand Trunk Station of 1875 located a kilometre to the south which burned to the ground in 1913. The town bought the station buildings and restored them in 1986. It is now an inter-modal bus and rail depot served by Ontario Northland. It has been designated by the Town as an historical structure. Nearby is a provincial historic plaque commemorating the arrival in 1875 of the railway in Gravenhurst.



**9 Orange Lodge Hall ~ 140 First Street South**

No longer are secret passwords whispered through 1897 peepholes. Long a focus of social life in rural communities and a religious and political power in Ontario, the Orange Lodge declined after World War II. Some of the most popular public Lodge activities were the July 12 Parades down Muskoka Road. These continued into the 1960s even after the virtual demise of the organization.



10 Knox Presbyterian Church ~ 315 Muskoka Road North

Completed and dedicated in 1878, Knox Presbyterian Church is a charming example of frame construction known as Carpenter's Gothic. For almost 60 years the steeple housed an 800-pound bell used for church purposes but also as the volunteer firefighters' alarm. The bell was removed in 1932. Reverend Malcolm Bethune was minister from 1889 to 1893. His son, Dr. Norman Bethune, became famous for his dedication to social causes in Canada and for his medical care to victims of wars in Spain and China.



11 Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site ~ 235 John Street North



This former Presbyterian Church manse, built in 1880, is the birthplace of Dr. Norman Bethune, arguably the best known Canadian abroad since he is a national hero to over a billion Chinese. In 1936-37 he implemented mobile blood transfusion units at the battlefield during the Spanish Civil War. In 1939 he died performing surgery in China during the Second Sino Japanese war. He was a non-conformist surgeon of note, a humanitarian and an advocate of socialized medicine in Canada, even before Tommy Douglas. The site has been operated by Parks Canada since 1976 and receives 11,000 visitors annually, of whom almost half come expressly from the People's Republic of China.

**VISIT**  
THE BETHUNE STATUE  
欢迎参观  
白求恩塑像



12 Brown's Beverages ~ 220 Bay Street

Enlarged several times, this bottling plant which produces the famous Muskoka Springs drinks was established in 1873 utilizing a nearby spring of crystal clear water. The owner, Dugald Brown, was a popular entrepreneur and hotel owner. It is one of the few remaining operating industrial buildings in Gravenhurst.



13 Garner Lodge ~ 315 Bay Street

This splendid mansion was built by Charles Mickle Sr., the greatest of Gravenhurst's lumber barons and president of the Mickle Dyment Lumber Company. It was built in 1877. First known as Rosehurst, it was often the scene of garden parties and weddings, sometimes with stages and curtains set up for shows. Mr. Mickle was twice mayor. In the late 1940s the Mickles sold the house to Mac Garner, owner of Garner Lodge on Lake Muskoka. It is now a real estate office.



14 Ditchburn House ~ 811 Bay Street



In 1927 two Ditchburn boats were fitted with machine guns for chasing Prohibition rum-runners off Nova Scotia. The residence was the Gravenhurst Legion from 1942 until 1960. Today it is an antique store.

This was the home of Herbert Ditchburn who operated the Ditchburn Boat Manufacturing Company from the 1870s until after the 1929 stock market crash.

15 16 17 Gull Lake Park, P.O.W. Steps and Barge Brock Street at Bethune Drive

Visitors and residents alike enjoy the beach, ball park, playground, tennis courts and tall pines. On Sunday evenings in the summer Music on the Barge is a tradition which in 2009 celebrated its 50th year. The fixed barge is surrounded by water and was officially opened by Queen Elizabeth II. From 1942 until 1960 in winter Gull Lake was the centre of ice harvesting in



Ontario until electric refrigeration became common. The concrete steps leading to the beach were built by German prisoners of war from Camp XX, which was known locally as the Muskoka Officers' Club.

18 Gravenhurst Wharf ~ 820 Bay Street



The first steamboat dock was built here in 1866 to service the steamer *Wenonah*, A.P. Cockburn's first Muskoka steamship which plied the Muskoka Lakes. It has been rebuilt several times. It now serves as the loading point for RMS Segwun and *Wenonah II* boat cruises. The nearby ticket office was built in 1991 in the style of the original Grand Trunk rail terminal of 1896 which stood across the bay and through which thousands of passengers transferred from train to steamer.



**19** Albert Hill Building ~ 181 Bay Street

Albert Hill was a noted blacksmith and mayor of Gravenhurst 1913-1914. He operated a major livery stable in town.

The wrought iron fence which is still in place was his work. The present building was erected after the Great Fire of 1887.



**20** Muskoka Boat and Heritage Centre (MBHC) ~ 275 Steamship Bay Road



A hub of heritage activity in Gravenhurst is the MBHC, formerly known as Grace and Speed. This museum showcases the craftsmanship of Muskoka's world famous boat builders. It features priceless examples of "in the water" antique boat exhibits, the only such facility in North America. In addition to state-of-the-art interactive displays the centre has research space and is home to the Muskoka Steamship and Historical Society. The Society conducts an ongoing program "Connecting with the Community", an interesting speaker series. The MBHC has recently hosted a Chinese Gift Exhibit and another of antique and wooden boat models.

**21** Clipsham House ~ 180 Phillip Street West

Clipsham House is one of the oldest residences in town and unlike most is constructed with brick and has quoin. James Clipsham started out as blacksmith but by 1877 his business had evolved into the Clipsham Carriage Works which made wagons and buggies. The business stood immediately to the east but was razed in the Great Fire of 1887; nonetheless it was back in business six weeks later.



**22** Finch House ~ 190 Mary Street North

Finch House resembles (#11) Bethune Memorial House nearby and represents stately accommodation of a bygone era. It was built around 1880 in a 'Stick



Style' of architecture developed in New England. A one time resident was a Mr. Thibault who was once a patient at the local tuberculosis sanitorium. The property was originally part of Dugald Brown's land grant. Archdeacon Linsdell purchased the house and passed it along to his daughter May, a local newspaper columnist.

**23** Blaincroft B & B ~ 180 Hughson Street



Built circa 1886 and once the home of the hotel keeper David Lafreniere whose hotel was where the Post Office now is, this house was later occupied by J.J. McNab, an accountant for the Mickle Dymont Lumber Company and afterwards by postmaster Fred Freeman. It has been a Bed and Breakfast operated by the Griffith family and now the Blains for some time. The brick house, now with siding, was at one time called Maple Hall

**24** Trinity United Church ~ 290 Muskoka Road North

Trinity United Church was built in 1926 and enlarged in 1959. It replaced the 1877 Methodist Church originally on this site. Locals created the aluminum sculpture and flower beds which adorn the lawn and contribute to Communities in Bloom. The dark brick is highlighted by colourful floral displays each summer.



**25** Gateway Arch

Originally built in 1925 to welcome motorists to Muskoka, the first arch went through four versions before it was demolished in 2005 to allow for road widening. In 2009 it has been newly constructed with its original texts.



**26** Sagamo Site ~ Muskoka Boat and Heritage Centre Parking Lot

The Royal Mail Ship Sagamo was the finest steamer to ply the waters of Muskoka Lakes. It could carry 800 passengers at a time. Built in 1906 by the Muskoka Lakes Navigation and Hotel Company it would depart from Gravenhurst on daily cruises to Lake Joseph. In 1925 it burned but was rebuilt and remained in active service until 1958. Attempts to convert it into a floating restaurant failed when in 1969 it caught fire again. The remains of its hull can be seen underwater near the shoreline by the interpretive panel dedicated to it.

