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Long Branch



Thomas Willie, Manager of Long Branch Park (Robert A. Haven)

The first owner of the waterfront land that would one day be called "Long Branch" was Captain Samuel Smith, who had served in the Queen's Rangers under Captain John Graves Simcoe during the American Revolution and again when Simcoe reformed this regiment in Upper Canada in 1791. Smith was a great favourite of Simcoe's and was granted 3000 acres of land for his military service: 400 acres in York (Toronto) and 2600 acres in Etobicoke in a tract bound by Lake Ontario, Etobicoke Creek, today's Bloor Street and today's Kipling Avenue. To this day, the area is known in property records as "Colonel Smith's Tract." Simcoe's records indicate he had plans to change the names of Etobicoke Township and Etobicoke River to Smith Township and Smith River, but Simcoe returned to England in 1796 before this change had been enacted.

After Simcoe left, he passed the command of the Queen's Rangers to Smith who was now a Colonel. He became a civilian in 1798, and in 1799, at age 43, he married 20-year old Jane Isabella Clark. They had 11 children – two boys and nine girls. In 1815, Smith was appointed to Upper Canada's Executive Council, and then served as temporary Administrator of Upper Canada in 1817-18 and 1820.

Smith's home in Etobicoke was a four room log cabin that was already on the property, likely built by the four Carr brothers who were squatters. It was located in what today is the school yard behind St. Josaphat Catholic School on 41st Street. It was built of pine timber, dovetailed at the corners and secured with hickory pegs, and its floor was of pine boards two inches thick and fourteen inches across.

Smith soon added two rooms to each end of the cabin and covered the exterior with wood siding. Smith built a saw mill on Etobicoke Creek and bred horses, but does not appear to have had any skill at farming. He possessed a surfeit of social status and land, but his income as a half-pay officer was too low to develop his vast estate. Jane Smith died in September 1826, and Samuel Smith passed away a month later. At that time, their destitute children ranged in age from

twenty-five to eight. The eldest child, a daughter named Ann, petitioned to the Lieutenant Governor for assistance and received a grant. The children left the property to live in a log house supplied by John William Gamble, brother of the first reeve of Etobicoke. The house was soon taken over by squatters once more, and most of the Smith-owned land in Etobicoke was unused until well into 19th century.



Colonel Samuel Smith's former home in the 1950s (Montgomery's Inn)
In 1861, James and Margaret Eastwood purchased the old house and 500 acres of lakefront property from the Smith Estate. They cleared the timber and farmed the land. In 1883, they sold 64 acres on the eastern edge of their property to a consortium which developed it into an exclusive summer resort area. The land was subdivided into 250 villa lots where the well-off could build summer cottages. In 1886, Thomas J. Wilkie, who had held leadership positions with the YMCA in Toronto and Brooklyn, was hired to bring the plan to fruition, assisted by his brother John. The resort was named "Long Branch Park", likely

after New Jersey's famous seaside resort. Soon the entire area was known as "Long Branch".



Thomas Wilkie, Manager of Long Branch Park (Robert A. Haven)
The first villa lot was sold in 1886 to Richard and Amy Ough. Richard was an architect who designed many cottages in the park, including his own. Named "Idlewild", it still stands today at 262 Lake Promenade, overlooking Lake Ontario and still looking very much like the original plan.

LONG BRANCH

by Robert A. Given

Our village of Long Branch began as a summer resort. The first residents were Colonel Samuel Smith of the Queens Rangers, his family and servants who lived in a house on the south side of the Lake Shore Highway just east of Etobicoke Creek.

On 2 occasions he was Administrator of Upper Canada when the lieut-governor was out of the province. The Col. Smith Tract extended from the lake north to Bloor and from Etobicoke Creek east to Kipling Avenue. Col. Smith died in 1826 but his turn-of-the-century home was a landmark until 1952 when it was demolished to make way for a Dominion Store parking lot!

In 1871 James and Martha Eastwood bought the farm on the south side of the highway from Samuel Smith Jr.

On October 1st 1883 James Eastwood sold 54 acres to William Reford and James Watson Hughes who were tea brokers, and Simeon Heman Janes a land broker.

On the same day Eastwood sold 10 acres to William and Martha Lennox, hotel proprietors.

On December 4, 1884, Reford, Hughes and Janes had Plan 602 for Villa lots and Sea Breeze Park registered at the County Registry Office.

Sea Breeze Avenue was to go from Lake Shore Road to the lake with the 10-acre park, hotel and wharf.

There were to be 2 other north-south avenues, 3 short east-west roads and the suggestion Sea breeze Avenue could be extended north to a station on the Great Western Railway.

Nothing much happened in the next 2 years until the arrival of Thomas J Wilkie, a man of vision, and his brother, John N. Wilkie, manager of John D. Naismith's Steam Bakery and Lunch Counters.

Thomas J. Wilkie and his brother were sons of John Wilkie the veterinary surgeon and blacksmith of Richmond Hill. Their mother Elizabeth was the daughter of William Bingham, founder of that family in Canada.

In 1869 T.J. was appointed the first secretary for the

Toronto YMCA and 2 years later established the first "Y" facility for the military at Niagara-on-the-Lake. Then he established a Railway "Y" facility for the blacksmith and other shop workers in the rail yards. In 1880 T.J. joined the Brooklyn, New York YMCA.

Just 54 miles south of New York City is Long Branch, New Jersey, on the eastern or "long" branch of the Shrewsbury River.

As time went by some residents found summers on the oceanfront were enjoyable.

The Mansion House was built and Mrs Abraham Lincoln was a guest for 10 days. Then the Continental Hotel, the world's largest opened. In 1869 U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant made Long Branch the Summer Capitol.

Now Long Branch, America's first seashore resort, has the Church of 7 Presidents, boardwalk, ocean pier, etc. Closer to home on Burlington Beach the 3-story Ocean House opened in May 1875 as the Long Branch of Canada. It boasted a dance hall, music salon, bowling alley, billiard parlour and boat livery.

In 1886 Thomas J. Wilkie returned to Toronto leaving Brooklyn YMCA with the largest and best equipped building in the world up to that time. He returned with an endowment to establish boys summer camps, some with the help of J.G. Cornell of Scarborough. Incidentally his first wife was Charlotte Cornell of Scarborough. When he came back his physician advised him to seek out of door work and a relaxing of mental strain.

He purchased a "farm" west of Toronto and converted it into a summer resort called "Long Branch".

On October 11, 1886 a new Plan M9 for Villa Lots and Long Branch Park was registered at the County's new Land Titles Office. Thomas J. Wilkie's plan added 2 new east-west roads, a "fountain square" and suggested the wharf be located to the east. The Wilkies sold the first lot to Amy Writh Ough for her architect husband Richard in October and a lot to Christopher James Hohl, the latter, in November. At least 20 lots were sold in 1887 and the Long Branch Park Hotel with its Japanese balconies and Pagoda towers was completed, probably by Johnny Owe,

a contractor from Toronto Gore to the north-west.

Long Branch was surrounded by a huge fence about 12 feet high and a 5-foot reserve on its west, north and east sides.

Two brick pillars topped by beautiful lamps were at the park entrance near today's St. Agnes Church.

The iron gates were locked but the attendant was nearby.

Long Branch was a gated community like some popular resorts in New Jersey and like Grimsby near Niagara.

There was to be no intoxicating beverages in the park and no carriages or other vehicles on Sundays.

Long Branch had a merry-go-round, a grand pavilion with hardwood floor for dancing, another pavilion with 300 seats for dining, water slides, bathing and boating facilities, lawn bowling and tennis courts.

An engine house had a 40 HP motor for an electric dynamo to provide lighting in the park. The resort's steamer, the Rupert, provided commuter service 6 days a week.

Excursion steamers like the Greyhound, White Star and J.W. Steinhoff called at Long Branch as well as the Humber and Port Credit.

When we think of Long Branch today we usually think of the lake from 23rd Street west to 43rd Street and Etobicoke Creek.

Wilkie's Long Branch was from a little east of 33rd Street to a little west of 35th Street. Among the conditions of sale was the stipulation that "the purchaser must build a MESSUAGE or cottage of a size and design subject to the approval of the vendor, that the purchaser shall not..."

In 1889 Bingham & Webber published a booklet on "Long Branch-Toronto's Favourite Summer Resort."

It became a popular spot for church picnics and YMCA "camp" meetings.

The 5-foot boundary reserve was transferred to William Edward Cornell real estate agent, who had spent much on the hotel and park.

In 1908 Dorothy Wright acquired the water lot by the park.

On July 1, 1895 the Toronto and Mimico Electric Railway and Light Company reached Etobicoke Creek from Queen and Roncesvalles. One of its directors was Joseph Barrett, broker, of the Mimico Real Estate Security Co. Ltd.

By this time Col. Frederick Burton Robins had been 10 years in the real estate business. In 1908 he formed Robins Limited and soon began developing The Pines, Pine Beach, Lake Shore Gardens and Annex in Long Branch.

In 1914 Mrs Sarah Jane Skeen moved to Long Branch where her husband had a blacksmith shop. Forty years later at age 83 she recalled the little old round pavilion among the trees. She was taken there a number of times as a little girl for picnics and remembered them paying at the toll gate. Harry Sweller said he built the first permanent non-cottage house in the Park in 1919.

The first Long Branch Post Office opened Aug 1, 1891, and closed Oct 25, 1910. The second PO has been dated 1911 to 1935.

The first classes for Etobicoke School Section No. 12 were held in Long Branch Baptist Church while a 4 room school with big auditorium for community activities was being built on 31st Street. In 1921 Captain Oattes built a home on "the flats", a sand bar which extended across the mouth of Etobicoke Creek from the east bank. On Oct 16, 1954, Hurricane Hazel destroyed 43 homes and 7 people lost their lives. To the west of the Creek the Ontario Rifle Association and the Government established the Long Branch Rifle Ranges in 1891.

In May 1915 Curtis Aeroplanes and Motors Company of Toronto opened Canada's first airfield and flying school there. Its objective was to train airmen for service in World War I. The original manager of the airfield was John A.D. McCurdy who had already won fame as the first aviator in the British Empire with his flight in the "Silver Dart" at Baddeck, Nova Scotia, in 1909.

In June 1940, Small Arms Limited was formed. On Sept 6, 1924, Abram Michael Orpen opened his Long Branch Race Track also beyond the village. The Telegram of Sept 28, 1945, reported 20 families were living in trailers in the centre of the village. Sanitary conveniences and water were provided in a large brick house... a real housing shortage.



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HISTORY

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The History of Long Branch, Ontario 1884 - 1984

Long Branch Park was once an exclusive summer vacation site catering to Toronto's elite. The reason for its success was also one of the main causes of its decline.

Posted by Heather Zorzini on May 8, 2009



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Thomas J. Wilkie, founder of Long Branch Park. (Robert A. Haven)

Entrepreneur Thomas J. Wilkie, known as the founder of Long Branch, created his resort as a practical solution to the problems of summer time travel in an era before cars and highways.

In those days, Torontonians ventured to the shores of Muskoka, the Kawarthas and Georgian Bay. But journeys by train, stagecoach and steamer were a traumatic ordeal. Weekend visits were impossible and many businessmen, unable to spend lengthy periods away from their offices, could not vacation with their families.

Wilkie's Long Branch Park was only a 45 minute sail from the foot of Yonge Street.

The Naming of Long Branch, Ontario

According to the book *Villages of Etobicoke*, the original 1884 plan showed 219 cottage lots and Sea Breeze Park. It comprised 64 acres south of what is now Lakeshore Blvd. W. between 33rd and 35th Streets. The name was later changed to Long Branch Park.

There are at least six "authentic" versions as to how the area was

There are at least six additional versions as to how the area was named. Wilkie, an American, is reputed to have visited Long Branch,

New Jersey, which was established as a summer resort before Long Branch, Ontario. This is the most probable story.

The Architecture of Long Branch

No expense was spared in the park's elaborate design. Fountains, lawns, gravel walks, swings, tennis and croquet lawns, boat houses, a pavillion and a Coney Island carousel were constructed for the amusement of the cottagers. As well, a toboggan water slide, the first in Canada, provided recreation and entertainment for both the bather and the onlooker.

In addition, Wilkie sold 250 choice wooded villa lots, most of them 50 feet wide and 150 feet deep. Fashionable Queen Anne-style cottages with turrets, peaked roofs and shady, wrap-around verandas soon appeared, designed by some of Toronto's most prominent architects.

Visitors could also stay at the Hotel Long Branch, an elegant building with Japanese balconies and pagoda towers. The 1889 Souvenir Guide boasts that the hotel was "lighted by electricity, has electric bells, and speaking tubes in every room, and a private telephone wire to Toronto." Rates were \$2.50 a day and \$10-15.00 per week.

Long Branch Park Cottage Life in the 1880s

Summers at Long Branch Park were considerably different from cottage living today.

The entire resort was surrounded by a high iron fence to keep out rowdy intruders. Intoxicating beverages were not allowed on the grounds and the Sabbath was strictly observed with closed gates and quiet shores. Religious services and Sunday school instruction were held in the pavillion and were well attended.

Long Branch Park soon became a popular destination for Toronto's elite. In the summer of 1888, steamships including White Star and Greyhound brought more than 50,000 pleasure seekers. By 1894, vacationers could also travel by streetcar.

Long Branch Park Becomes Long Branch Village

Eventually, the main reason for Long Branch Park's success - its closeness to Toronto - caused its decline as a seasonal resort. Although the cottage era lasted until the 1930s, permanent residential development in surrounding areas began as early as 1910 and many summer homes were winterized for full time use.

Around 1915-1916 Long Branch's main road, the Lakeshore Highway,

became the first concrete slab highway in Canada. At the same time, the first flying school in Canada, the Long Branch Curtis School began to train airmen for duty in World War I.

September 6, 1924 was opening day at the Long Branch Race Track. December 19, 1924 was opening night at the Long Branch Royal Theatre. The Long Branch Fire Department, a volunteer unit, was established that year. When the village incorporated in 1931, it gained a police force as well.

Unwelcome Changes in Long Branch

In 1954, Hurricane Hazel swept through the lakefront community, taking seven lives and more than forty homes. The Hotel Long Branch burned to the ground a year later. And the earlier opening of the Queen Elizabeth Way eventually reduced traffic along the Lakeshore Highway to a mere trickle.

In an attempt to attract more residents and presumably more business for local shopkeepers, Long Branch by-laws were amended to allow multi-family dwellings. Lots had to be a minimum of 50 feet wide and most of the larger properties were occupied by old cottages.

In the end, many gracious summer homes fell to make way for boxy duplexes. Along with them went giant oaks, pines and maples. An idyllic era of picnics and parasols all but vanished.

Long Branch Community Spirit

Today, Long Branch's boundaries are the CN Rail line on the north, Lake Ontario to the south, Etobicoke Creek to the west and 23rd Street on the east. Though it has been part of the city of Toronto since 1954, it's residents maintain a strong sense of community. Wilkie's original vision has evolved into a full-time neighbourhood with easy access to downtown Toronto and the benefits of a resort-like setting.

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Canadian History

The History of Long Branch, Ontario 1791-1883

The Colonel Smith Tract was the first land surveyed in Etobicoke. Part of it was eventually developed as Long Branch Park, a west end summer resort on Lake Ontario

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On December 26 1791, the British Parliament passed the Constitutional Act, establishing the provinces of Upper Canada and Lower Canada. Colonel John Graves Simcoe became the first lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada that same year.

Brief History of the First Military Tract in Etobicoke

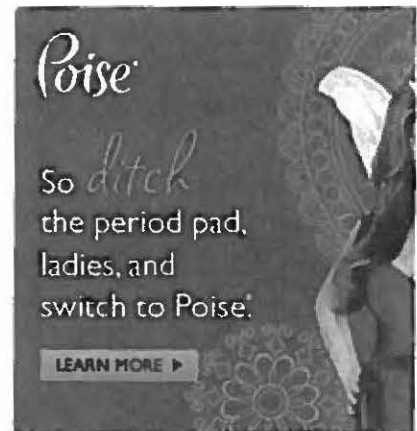


Heather Zorzini

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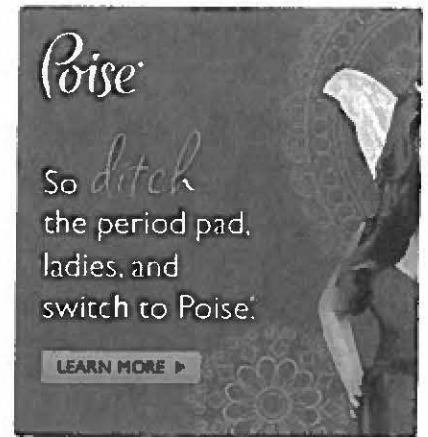
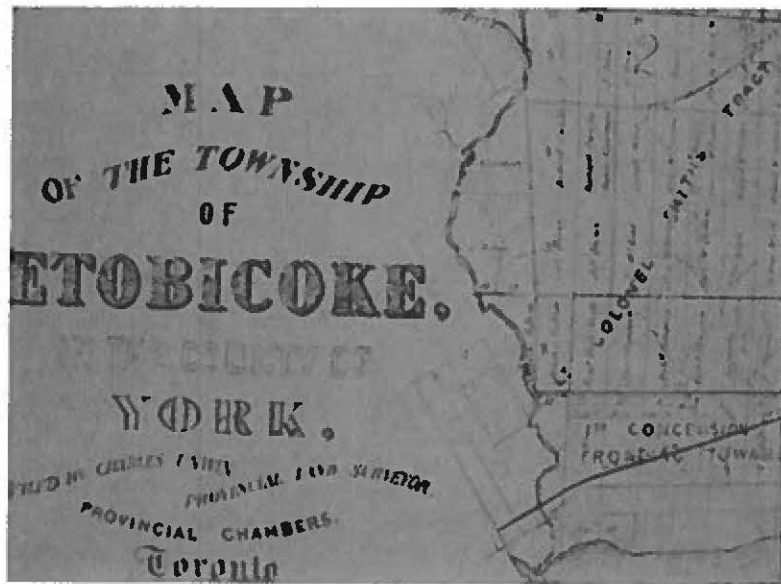
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The First Military Tract in Etobicoke consisted of about 4150 acres, bounded by Lake Ontario in the south, Etobicoke Creek in the west, and the Streets now known as Bloor in the north and Royal York in the east.

Simcoe had planned to settle his new territory with veterans and retired soldiers from his old command. They would develop the land and also provide defence for the town of York. One of the men to receive some of this property was Colonel Samuel Smith.

Samuel Smith and the Queen's Rangers

According to the book *Villages of Etobicoke*, Smith was born at Hempstead, Long Island, New York. His father, James Smith, was a strong supporter of the King. At the outbreak of the American Revolution, Samuel Smith joined the Queen's Rangers.

Ensign Smith fought in several battles and was severely wounded in the Battle of Brandywine. Soon after, he was promoted to captain.

After the surrender at Yorktown in 1781, Smith went on half-pay. In 1783, he settled in New Brunswick before proceeding to England for a few years. Back in England, he learned that the Constitutional Act had been signed and set out for York in 1792.

The Colonel Smith Tract in Upper Canada

Captain Smith joined the new regiment of Queen's Rangers for Upper Canada. He was made captain-commandant and later, major-commandant.

Smith received 1600 acres of land in Etobicoke in 1793. He also owned 400 acres in York, from an earlier grant. He exchanged 1000 acres in Flamboro for 1000 acres in Etobicoke, for a total of 2600 acres in Etobicoke.

In 1795, Smith requested a survey of his part of the military lands. This portion was bound by Lake Ontario on the south, Bloor street on the north, Etobicoke Creek on the west and Kipling Avenue in the east.

This was the first survey in Etobicoke and to this day it is known as the Colonel Smith Tract. Smith settled in the south-west corner of his property and built a log cabin near the intersection now known as 41st Street and Lakeshore Blvd. West.

In 1796, Simcoe returned to England. The command passed to Smith, now a colonel, who led the Queen's Rangers from 1796 to 1798, when he left the military.

The Family Life of Colonel Sam Smith

On October 22, 1799, 43-year-old Smith married Jane Isabella Clarke, daughter of Doctor Joseph Clark. She was twenty years old.

The Smith's log cabin was extended and covered in clapboard to accommodate a growing family. According to an 1805 census, 84 people lived in Etobicoke. It showed Smith as married, with two sons and two daughters under the age of sixteen plus three servants. The Smiths eventually had seven more daughters.

On October 7, 1815, Col. Smith was appointed member of the Executive Council. Upon the retirement of Lieutenant-Governor Francis Gore, Smith became Administrator of the Province from June 11, 1817 until August 12, 1818 when Sir Peregrine Maitland took over. The colonel was also an administrator for a short time in 1820.

Col. Smith's Overwhelming Obligations

Smith's responsibilities were overwhelming. In his book *Statistical Account of Upper Canada*, Robert Gourlay described the deplorable conditions of the Lakeshore Indian Trail in 1818. Gourlay lost his way in the woods when the road disappeared a short distance from Smith's house.

Gourlay says, "The very gravel bed which caused me so much turmoil might have been a turnpike, but what can be done by a single hand? Col. Smith could do little with the axe or wheelbarrow himself, and half-pay could but employ few labourers at three shillings, sixpence per day."

Colonel Smith's Death Leaves Family Destitute

On October 20, 1826, the Honourable Col. Samuel Smith passed away from a stroke, exactly one month after the death of his wife. Their ten surviving children, ranging in age from about eight to 25 years, were left without provision.

Anne, the eldest, wrote to Maitland in 1826 pleading for financial assistance for herself and her younger siblings. She pointed out the service rendered by her late father, noting that they could not participate in the army's orphans' fund because Smith sold his commission after the regiment disbanded. Her appeal to the House of Assembly was ultimately denied.

Development of Long Branch Park

The Smith's homestead stayed in the family after the Colonel's death. His son, Samuel Boies Smith, sold the house and 500 acres to James Eastwood in 1871.

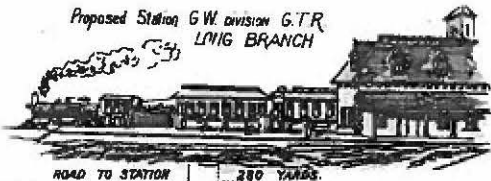
In 1883, Eastwood sold approximately 75 acres of the eastern portion of his land. The next year, the same property was registered for development as Long Branch Park.

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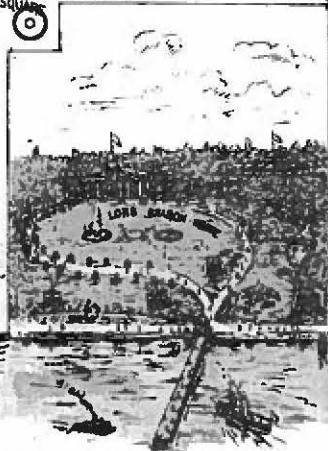
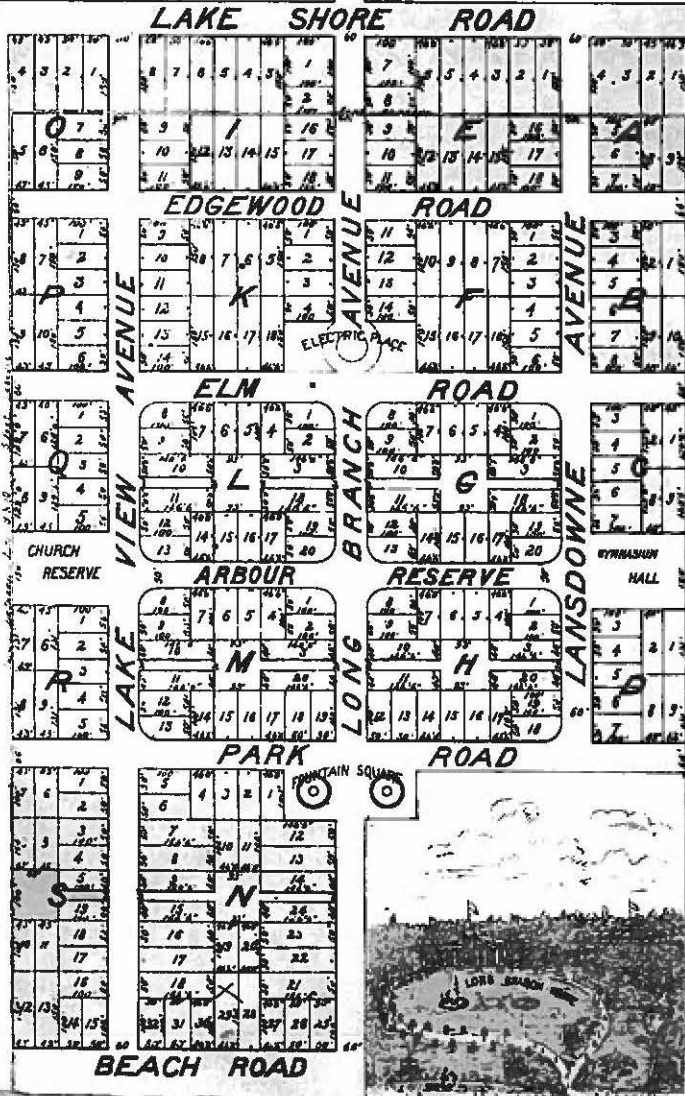
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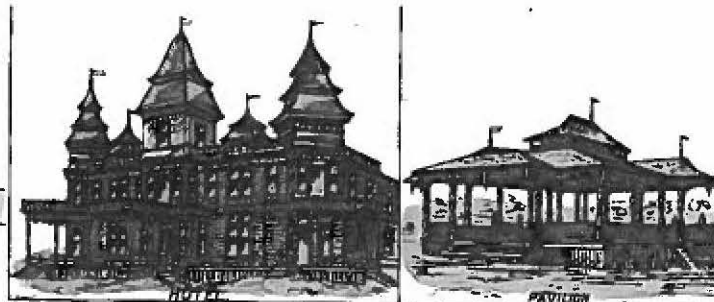


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The roads and avenues through the property are 40 feet wide, the lake being about 10 feet deep by 100 to 120 feet in depth, the greater part beautifully wooded with birch, maple, pine, elm and maple of mature growth and beautiful foliage.

Adding this charming retreat for Summer Cottages, is situated "Long Branch Grove," containing 22 acres of shady green lawns on the lake shore, with ample parking space.

All "Long Branch Grove" has been created a reservation under Summer Hotel, Private Pavilion, Electric Summer Arbours, Bridges, Boats, Springs, Merry-go-round, Band and Working Machinery, a substantial structure including gym and 200 feet of a 12 foot wide, including one of the most delightful playgrounds in the country. It is intended to have the park illuminated by electric light, the apparatus of which may be used for lighting Long Branch generally, as well as for playing football on the grounds.

Arrangements have been made to run a line of fast motor omnibuses continuously during the day (Monday excepted), with early hours leaving "Long Branch" at about 7, 8 and 9 a.m. for the city, and late hours leaving Toronto for "Long Branch" at 10, 11 and 12 p.m., thus giving the most direct communication to their respective points in Toronto and leaving the city and back at all hours of the day and evening during the season. The G.T.R. Co. are willing to extend the Park to greatly reduced or nominal rates.

No park omnibuses, hotel and omnibus garage and water retreat can be found near Toronto for summer cottages, camping, boating, fishing, bathing, picnicking, etc.

The title to the Long Branch Property is purchased under the "Ontario Titles Act," and has been placed under the Torrens system, thus being guaranteed by the Crown, so that one can buy or sell, obtaining permanent title, and hold a freehold at very moderate cost.

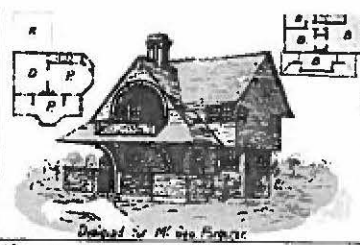
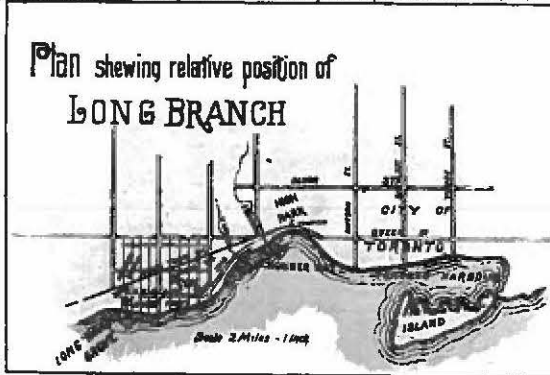
Long Branch will be conducted on strictly non-exclusive principles. Lots will not be sold individually, but to subscribers only, who can be depended upon to maintain the reputation of the resort.

Outstanding mortgage lots will ideally stand in the names of their respective holders who wish to subscribe at Long Branch.

Plans of property, standards and other information on application.

N.B. **THOMAS A. WILKE**, at "Long Branch Summer Resort." Office: Corner of Adelaide and Church Streets, TORONTO.

The land for all the lots appropriate and is supplied with electric light, gas, water and Telephone connections direct with Toronto.



Designed by M. H. P. Duggan
Piccola Ougi, Architect, Toronto

Alexander & Cable, Lith. Toronto