



ROBERT HOME SMITH

1877 – 1935

Robert Home Smith was a pioneer visionary who dramatically changed the face of Toronto and large portions of Etobicoke.

While a hearing disability he contracted through a childhood illness may have deterred him from pursuing a life in politics, it did not detract from Home Smith's great accomplishments. During his life, Home Smith held many posts, served on numerous boards, and found

success in a number of careers. He was a lawyer and a businessman, a visionary and a philanthropist. He was lauded throughout his lifetime and the subject of poems after his death.

Home Smith graduated from Osgoode Hall and was called to the bar in 1899. While he was a very successful lawyer, it was actually through his investments in Northern Ontario mining that he accumulated personal wealth. Home Smith's financial comfort enabled him to pursue other interests, such as serving on many public commissions for little or no compensation.

In November 1913, at only thirty-six years of age, Home Smith had already envisioned Toronto as a potential world class city when he posed a rhetorical question during a speech at the Canadian Club: "Are you going to have a Birmingham or Pittsburgh, or a London or Paris?"

Home Smith was particularly interested in developing the Humber River Valley. Around 1911, the area was mostly wilderness dotted with mills and farmhouses. However, Home Smith envisioned an exclusive neighbourhood of expansive homes catering to the wealthy business sector. With the financial backing of a number of affluent businessmen, Home Smith purchased more than three thousand acres of land along both banks of the Humber River. Plans for the development were known as the Humber Valley Surveys. Places of worship, farmers' markets, public recreation

areas, and a variety of commercial designations were included in the plans. Home Smith's Humber Valley vision is still considered one of the most ambitious planned development proposals in North America.

The Humber River project was ultimately realized and Home Smith became an area resident. As such, he took an active role in maintaining standards of aesthetic design in the neighbourhood. This included the vetting of building designs through his company's architects.

In 1912, Home Smith donated over one hundred acres along the river's edge to Etobicoke for parkland. He also built the Old Mill Tea Room, which opened in August 1914 and still exists as the historic heart of the picturesque Old Mill hotel. Home Smith continued to build and expand the hotel over the decades, staying true to its English Tudor architectural style.

Etobicoke areas such as Riverside Drive, Baby Point Estates, Humber Valley Village, Kingsway Village, The Old Mill, and St. George's Golf Course all bear the stamp of this remarkable Toronto planner and developer. An obituary poem penned as tribute to Robert Home Smith was written by poet and friend Wilson Macdonald.

"His empire was the Humber and that stream,
Flowed ever through the valley of his heart."

Inducted into the Etobicoke Hall of Fame in 1974