

Hammonds Plains Historical Society

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The History of the Hammonds Plains Road (Route 213)

(Editor's Note – To celebrate Heritage Month, we are devoting this newsletter to giving a detailed history of the Hammonds Plains Road)



The Old and the New 1959 – Picture of the turn in front of Mason's Pond (across from Pharmasave) showing new section (created in 1957) and old road

During the 230 year history of Hammonds Plains, no issue has been discussed more among Hammonds Plains residents, than the road that runs through the community, most commonly called the 'Hammonds Plains Road'. The road was first started in the late 1700's and since that time it has been a lightning rod for debate within the community. The following is a history of the road from its beginnings as a trail through the woods to the current modern day suburban connector road.

Long before Hammonds Plains developed into a permanent community, the land was home to the Mi' Kmaq nation. They had winter encampments in the Pockwock Lake area and would move down a path to the shores of the Bedford Basin for the



Upcoming General Meetings:

March 28th – 7pm - General Meeting – A look at Dorothy Bezanson Evans Book – 'Hammonds Plains – The First 100 Years – A discussion with her son, Ross Evans

May 30th – 7pm – Military History of Hammonds Plains

Become a HPHS Member:

You can become a member of the Hammonds Plains Historical Society by filling out a registration form and e-mailing it to Dave Haverstock (haverstockdave@gmail.com) or mailing to 1541 Hammonds Plains Road, Hammonds Plains, Nova Scotia B4B 1P6.

Annual fee is \$10.

Registration forms are available during one of our general meetings or by copying from our web site.

summer season. It is estimated that this journey would take them about one day traveling non-stop. It is thought that their trail was close to where the present day Hammonds Plains Road is today.

With the English establishing Halifax as its major base for military operations in 1749, soon trails started to spread out from new settlement. There is evidence that a footpath about 3.5 meters wide, was created from Halifax (via the Windsor Road) to Lunenburg in the 1750's. This footpath came close to the future Hammonds Plains area. In 1784, Governor Parr (Nova Scotian English Governor) ordered a road cut in a straight line cross country from Halifax to Annapolis Royal (as a mail route). This route would have went through present day Hammonds Plains. However, despite the order, the road was not completed.

In 1786, to support the increasing loyalist population, the government issued the Hammonds Plains Land Grant to 72 land owners. The government paid for the opening of a road from the Sackville River to St. Margaret's Bay to provide support to the land grants. The land grants were considered attractive because of a government promise that a new Halifax to Annapolis Road was going to be developed and it would go through the land grants of Hammonds Plains. However, the road project faltered, other than doing some work on the road at both ends. The first homes were built on the issued land grants in the late 1780's. In the 1791 census of HP, there were 15 recorded homes but only 3 recorded horses, so there was no real need for more than a foot trail between homes.

However, sometime around the turn of the 19th century, a road was carved out from the Hammonds Plains Grants to Mill Cove on Bedford Basin. However, by the early 1800's many of the original land grantees either had sold their lots or the lots had been taken away by government due to non-settlement. New owners, mostly from the Chester area, fortunately were interested in creating a village in this area and bought up many of the original lots. This corresponded with considerable buzz within government circles about another attempt at creating a road between Halifax and Annapolis Royal (for reasons of settlement and delivery of mail).

By 1815, two conflicts involving Britain (War of 1812 and Napoleonic War) ended. With the end of war, there was a great flux of immigrants to Nova Scotia and they needed land. Roads were needed to create new land grants. The Governor of NS called for a road to be surveyed from Halifax to Annapolis Royal. The road would go through Hammonds Plains. This road was surveyed in 1815-16.

After the War of 1812, a large number of refugee blacks (known as the Chesapeake Blacks) were brought to Nova Scotia. One of the land grants given to this group were the land north of the white community of Hammonds Plains, along the proposed Annapolis Road. In 1816, Lord Dalhousie becomes Governor of Nova Scotia. He was an enthusiastic supporter of the new Annapolis Road and significant money was poured into the project from 1816-1829. Money was also given for the upgrading of a Head of St. Margaret's to HP road. This road joined the Annapolis Road around where Maplewood Subdivision joins the Pockwock Road today. Lord Dalhousie called for the creation of three new settlements along the Annapolis Road – Wellington, Sherbrooke and Dalhousie. Wellington was a settlement to be created near the head of Wright's Lake, just west of the community to be later called Kemptown.

The Hammonds Plains Road finally got its true beginnings at this time, as a real road was created out of the existing path. In the 1820's, each community appointed its own Road Commissioner, who was responsible for making decisions in maintaining the road in the community. Funds were given to each commissioner. However, the problem was that many of the commissioners spent all the money fixing roads around their lands. This happened in Hammonds Plains, and explains why the road in the middle of the developing village was better than on the outer limits. There is no evidence that a Road Commissioner existed in the new community of Upper Hammonds Plains, so it appears that extra funds were not given for this part of the road, as this time. But by the 1820's, a road complex had been created from Bedford Basin, along Nine Mile River, through Hammonds Plains, Jeffreo's Hill (Upper Hammonds Plains), Kemptown and on to the Chester/Windsor Road. At Wallis Hill, the St. Margaret's Bay Road through community of Yankeetown, connected to the HP road. There is evidence that this road complex was used by the Pony Express, in the early years. It was also during this time, that Carriages began to appear on the roads.

The 1830's were a time of economic downturn and due to this, less emphasis was put on the road system by the NS government. The road in Hammonds Plains saw little improvement during this time. However, the Lucasville Road was opened in 1831, connecting Hammonds Plains to Sackville. Evidence suggest there was probably a trail there previously.

By the 1840's, the economic conditions had improved and there was a push to update the roads to handle ever increasing carriages and wagons. But, a major blow was dealt to the Hammonds Plains Community by the Nova Scotian Government in 1840, when it was decided to change the route of the Chester to Halifax Road to follow along the current route # 3 (through Timberlea). This was disastrous news to the community as it decreased the importance of the Hammonds Plains Road, as the main route to Chester would no longer go through Hammonds Plains. The news caused quite a stir in the community.

There were numerous issues with the roads of the 1800's and the Hammonds Plains Road was no different. Issues included muddy surfaces during wet times, leading to carriages and wagons getting stuck, wheel malfunctions, rough rides because of the ruts, and travel during winter had to be done by sleigh. Particularly, problematic for the Hammonds Plains Road, were the up and down hills which caused issues of inconsistent speed, causing difficulties for the horse drawn modes of transportation.

After 1850, cooperage shops, farms, blacksmith shops, lumber mills began appearing along the main road, increasing the need to move products and thus, business travel became more common. A new road through Yankeetown was created during the 1880's.

During the late 1800's wagons ruled the Hammonds Plains Road, and it was a common sight to see barrel wagons on their way to market on a daily occurrence. During the late 1800's, the road through the village was widened and packed earth put down, but at the dawning of the 20th century the road was still very much a country road, with ruts year round, a mess of mud in the spring and snow covered in the winter.

The 1900's led to major upgrades for the road. In 1902, telephones were installed in Hammonds Plains, leading to lines and poles being put up along part of the road. By 1910, the car was becoming more common in Nova Scotia and around this time the Hammonds Plains Road would have seen its first motorized vehicle. It definitely would have been interesting during this time to see horses and cars sharing the road.

The 1920's were definitely a period of transition for the Hammonds Plains Road. The road was upgraded to handle cars with the introduction of gravel. The road was made wider, especially through the village and bridges updated. The road also started to become passable, without sleigh, during the winter, as the community developed a plan for clearing the road after winter snows. By the 1920's, most of the residents had some sort of fence running along the road not only for esthetics but also to keep their animals off the road. It was during the 1920's that the village of Kempton becomes a ghost town and the road to Kempton basically becomes obsolete.

In 1932, electricity comes to Hammonds Plains and brings with it power poles along the road. It was during the 1930's that trucks start to be owned by local businesses and replace the wagon as the method to take barrels and wooden boxes to market. Bicycles, especially among the youth were also a common sight on the road during this time. Around this time, provincial graders started to scrape the Hammonds Plains road to smooth it out during the dry times of the year. However, the road continued to be major mess during the spring time with ruts, mud and impassable sections being the norm. This was a yearly problem right up to the time the road was paved.

World War II brought different sights to the HP Road. Soldiers were often seen marching on the road during training exercises and bunkers were installed along the road, in case of an attack. During the war, there was rationing for gas and rubber and this limited traffic somewhat. After the war, a bus service was introduced to Bedford, with Pender's Bus Service (this service however, was short lived). The Provincial Highways Department also took over the plowing of the road in the winter.

The 1950's echoed in the era of modernism for the Hammonds Plains Road. The road was given provincial designation as a secondary route and named Route 213. The mid 1950's saw a major upgrade with fill being put in the lower parts and some of the hills shaved off. This was getting the road ready for the announced paving project of 1957-58. During 1957-58, the road had a major overhaul with the paving of the road. A modern road was built with grading, culverts, ditches and paving. A new section was built in front of Mason's Pond and the Yankeetown Bypass was created. Also a new Stillwater bridge was installed.

After the paving of the road, traffic increased significantly, as folks used the road as a short cut to St. Margaret's Bay and subdivisions started to push into Hammonds Plains (Uplands Park began in 1961). Despite the paving, the road was still prone to heaving due to frost in the spring and traffic tie ups during winter storms, as cars had difficulty with the hills. The 1970's saw further growth and increased traffic, with the residents expressing concern for the capacity of the road. Interestingly, this debate continues 45 years later. The road to Pockwock Lake from English Corner was upgraded and paved during the 1970's.

The 1980's and 90's was noteworthy due to traffic congestion. The first traffic lights were installed, repaving was done, new shoulders installed. Finally the road upgrades finally eliminated much of the frost heaving of the road during the spring.

The 21st Century Road has brought about substantial changes with more traffic lights, lower speed limits, introduction of four lanes on the Bedford section of the highway and active transportation lanes.

The road today shows little resemblance to the tiny 19th century path, other than location. The evolution of the road has mirrored the development of the greater community and despite the debates it has initiated over the decades, it remains the closest thing to iconic status that the community has ever had.

The Changing Face of the Hammonds Plains Road (all 3 pictures taken in front of the Baptist Cemetery)



The HP Road of the late 1800's – Horses, Wagons of Barrels and Ruts



The HP Road in 1955 just before paving



The Modern HP Road in 2013