

The Road to Contention

Echoes From the Past – Essay #5



No landmark, person or issue has taken up more air space with Hammonds Plains residents over the years, than discussion about the Hammonds Plains Road. Talk of the road has definitely been one of the most contentious issues that has faced the community since its origin. Here's a look back at the history of the road to understand this discord.

The original road was built as part of the agreement with the first land grants issued in 1786. The first road connected the Hammonds Plains grants to the Paper Mill Lake region in Bedford. In the early 1800's, the British Governor of the Province conveyed plans for the Hammonds Plains Road to be part of a new Halifax to Annapolis Royal connector road. This road was to follow the already established road from Bedford to the Hammonds Plains land grants and then to Wright's Lake via the road through the newly settled African Canadian community (Upper Hammonds Plains) and beyond to New Ross (and eventually Annapolis Royal). The cancellation of the road project beyond the Hammonds Plains area in 1832 led to an angry resentment from the residents along the road, resulting in the road becoming a major focus point in the developing village.

Throughout the 1800's and early 1900's, the residents lobbied for funds to upgrade the road but had little success in improving the road beyond a narrow path. The road most often contained huge ruts and was just about impassable for the wagons and carriages of the time during the soft season. An all too common sight along the road in the spring were wagons, whose wheels were either stuck or broken, waiting for assistance. The numerous mill owners of the time in particular, led vocal retorts to the condition of the road and most often, their reactions were heard loudly throughout the village.

After the advent of motor vehicles, efforts were made to widen and provide a smoother surface to the road. Despite some cosmetic upgrades, cars still often got stuck in the muddy spring season. This led to many cases of less than Christian language being heard along the road. The winter presented its own unique challenges often leading to delayed travel times. Up until 1947, the community was actually responsible for clearing the snow from the road. After 1947 the Provincial Department of Highways took that task over.

After WW2, the road once again became front and center in public dialogue as residents demanded that their little gravelled road needed upgrading in order to safely move an increasing number of vehicles in the community. Finally, in the early 1950's the provincial government announced funding for a total rebuild of the Hammonds Plains Road, highlighted by the use of what residents termed 'magic stone' – pavement. The project took 4 years to complete.

Since paving the road, the talk of the community in relation to the road has transitioned to traffic volume and safety. Subsequently, this has led to residents sporadically organizing both formally and informally to get action on these issues during the last 50 years.

Here we are in 2020, and while the Hammonds Plains road has been enhanced over the years, far-reaching traffic issues still exists leading one to wonder whether the road will ever have a historical period of harmony.



The Hammonds Plains Road during the Spring Season – Early 1950's