

#94 Mtn. Mem. Aug. 2021

## HOW AN ARCHITECTURAL GEM WAS SAVED by Robert Williamson.

In June, for the 155<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Ridgeway, this heritage column connected Hamilton's Mountain militia volunteer, Captain William Wells and the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry to that significant 1866 historical event. This month we'll follow that same William Wells as a contractor to the often overlooked mountain community of Hannon at the intersection of Rymal and Dartnall roads to investigate the mystery of one of the city's missing 150 year old architectural gems.

In 1863, Reverend Canon George Bull lived on Bull's Lane at the top of present-day Claremont Access and Upper James. He was the Rector of St. Peter's Church on Mohawk Road West and inspired the Anglicans in the southeast part of Barton Township to build a church in the farm community of Hannon. The prospects for growth in that area were very promising after the successful completion of the Great Western Railway through Hamilton in 1854. Sir Allan MacNab became president of the Hamilton and Port Dover Railway and by 1862 a million dollars had been spent to reach the top of the escarpment through the Red Hill Valley to the Rymal Station convenient to the nearby post office, inn and blacksmith shop in Hannon. Railway construction eventually reached Port Dover by 1878.

The minutes of the newly formed St. George's Church Building Committee including J. B. Rousseaux and Joseph Hannon, accepted the building tender of William Wells to construct a board and batten church according to plans and specifications for \$800.00 by November 1864. William Wells had to mortgage five acres of his large Wells family farm on Upper James Street to cover his expenses for undercutting other bids of \$952.00 and \$1200.00. By 1960 the rest of the farm adjacent to the Barton Stone Church Cemetery had been sold to developers who built a large FENGATE plaza easily recognized today by an imposing Beer Store, a KFC, Bulk Barn, Service Ontario Licence Bureau, a TALIZE Discount Outlet and many other businesses. The original five acres, mortgaged to help finance the construction of St. George's Church, were recovered by the granddaughter of William Wells in 1940 and are now owned by her son, Robert Morris.

By 1878, the Hannon area astride the main railway to Lake Erie was flourishing as was St. George's Church. Evidence of that can be seen by the rapid expansion of its cemetery containing many well known community members such as: Joseph Hannon, James McBride, A. Rennie, T. Pearson, Wm Almas, J.B. Rousseaux, Wm Secord, E. Burkholder, as well as James Cook of Albion Mills and four families whose names appear on local roads; Glover, Fletcher, Rymal and Dartnall. But nothing lasts forever. In 1960 when the Hannon area was designated as the Red Hill Business Park, the church built by William Wells almost a hundred years earlier was closed and the congregation moved to another place of worship on Upper Gage Avenue.

About this time in 1962 near Jordan, UEL descendent, Manly Ball, sold the family's ancestral 1200 acre farm dating back to 1807 to the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority that was interested in the escarpment site with its two waterfalls and pioneer mills. Other heritage buildings were gathered together to create a historical tourist attraction. This included the abandoned St. George's Anglican Church in Hannon, which was moved to Ball's Falls in 1974 as a wedding chapel to compliment the heritage park's pioneer barn banquet centre. How beautiful it looks today, preserved in its new setting, an endorsement to the carpentry skill of Hamilton Mountain contractor William Wells.



*St. George's Wedding Chapel courtesy of Ball's Falls Conservation Area. Photo by Tony Fernandes.*



*St. George's Cemetery, Hannon. The bell on the left marks the original church site. Photo by R. Williamson*

*Mountain Memories by award winning writer Robert Williamson appears monthly for the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society. See <[Hamiltonheritage.ca](http://Hamiltonheritage.ca)> for more information.*