NATIVE VILLAGES

Black Creek has been settled in one form or another for hundreds of years. There is evidence of Native villages along the banks dating from 1500 AD. The villages ranged in size from 800 to 2,000 people, and fishing and agriculture was the way of life. Animal and human bones, arrowheads and broken pottery, and evidence of extensive trade with other villages as far away as Montreal and New York State, have been found.

Three larger villages have been identified in the watershed, they range in size from five to seven acres.

A village located at Wilson Avenue and Jane Street seems to have been built for defence purposes, surrounded by a double row of posts designed to keep attackers out. This village is now paved over, with a shopping plaza built over top of it.

Typically, the villagers moved every fifteen years as the wood and soil resources around their sites were depleted. They migrated northward, eventually ending up on the shores of Georgian Bay.

PIONEER SETTLEMENTS

Immigrants from Europe and the United States began settling in the Black Creek watershed in the late 1700s. The first settlers in the northern portion of the Creek were the Pennsylvania Dutch, who left the United States because of political persecution. These pioneers were given land grants from the government, providing that they cleared, fenced and planted five acres.

By the mid-1800s, the entire watershed had been divided up into parcels of land and was under intense cultivation. This was the beginning of major changes to the Black Creek. In an 1867 newspaper, it was said:

"...Our lands, by a course of exhaustive cropping, have become much deteriorated...Rise, fellow-men,...and with the advent of our new Dominion, proclaim the restoration of its soil."
(The Canada Farmer, 1867).

Roads and railways began to criss-cross the watershed, connecting the small communities with Toronto. The first roads were simply cleared tracks often following old Native portage routes, and mud would bog down the wagons during the rainy seasons. In 1841, it was decided that Weston Road needed to be an "all weather" road, making it passable throughout the year. This was achieved by 'planking' the road -placing three inch pine planks across the road. Toll gates were used to help collect the money required to maintain the planks, which became very costly.

"On September 13, 1878 a huge rain event caused extensive damage along Black Creek...The fine iron bridge on the Grand Trunk Railway at Black Creek, about half a mile west of Carleton, gave way and fell about nine o'clock this morning, about half an hour after the passing of the morning train...The bridge on the highway at this point was also carried off, and the country for half a mile was completely submerged."

The Toronto *Globe*, September, 1878.

The Northern Railway came into the area in 1853 and the Grand Trunk Railway crossed Black Creek in 1856. Railway transportation became a popular means of commuting and of shipping goods over long distances. The railway lines helped to determine the land use of the watershed, as many industries and town centres were located around train stations.

Saw-mills and grist-mills sprang up along the Creek, taking advantage of the plentiful source of water power. These sites became the centre of industries and around them towns such as Lambton and Weston grew.
Because the land was so quickly deforested, when a great flood occurred in 1878 wiping out many of the mills along Black Creek, most of them were never rebuilt.

LAND USE CHANGES

As the towns grew through the turn of the 20th century, the land use changed in the Black Creek watershed. Agricultural areas gave way to industrial and residential developments and the inevitable sewage problems. In 1924, the first sewage disposal plant in the area was constructed, with a concrete outlet leading through Lambton Golf Course to discharge into the Humber River. This outlet was fed by eight miles of sewers and was a first step in the attempt to improve the water quality of Black Creek.

In 1954, Hurricane Hazel swept through the Toronto region. Damage was done to bridges crossing Black Creek and to roads running alongside of it. The flooding that occurred was said to be one that could happen again, especially in light of the fact that the watershed was in a state of development. More and more paved surfaces were being drained directly into the Creek, resulting in a water system that was no longer operating within natural parameters. As a result, the local Conservation Authority developed a 'Black Creek Scheme', whereby flood vulnerable sections of the Creek would be straightened and encased in concrete. This would reduce erosion and quickly carry away polluted stormwater. By 1965, almost 5 kilometres of Black Creek had been channelized.

These changes in the structure of the Creek and the intense urban land use of the watershed have resulted in a system where pollution, flooding, eroding banks and a lack of wildlife habitat are seen as being the normal state of Black Creek. Through our rehabilitation efforts, Black Creek may once again be a healthy, meandering watercourse.