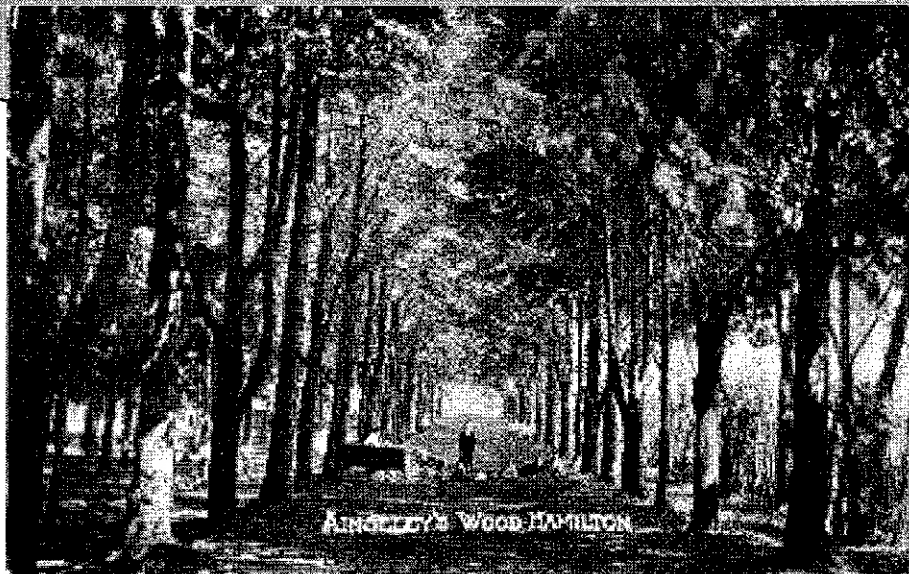


The Way We Were Ainslie's Wood

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Ainslie Wood was once private land owned by Colonel Robert C. Ainslie (alternate spellings are Ainsley and Ainslee). Colonel Ainslie inherited a 60-acre farm in the former Barton Township from his father, George Howlett Ainslie, who settled there in 1838. The farm was on what is now the south side of Main Street West, west of Longwood Road. George built a stone house on the property that lasted over a century. The beautifully forested area contained ravines, a spring, a stream, and a waterfall. In the 1880s it was turned over to his son, Colonel Ainslie, who added swings, a ball field, picnic tables, shady trees, and a pavilion with birds, raccoons, coyotes, monkeys, and other animals. In the late 1800s Hamiltonians made their way to this idyllic spot to picnic, watch birds, paint, and hike. "Go to the end of Aberdeen Avenue, cross the road to the west side, you enter the lane leading to the property," states an article in *The Hamilton Spectator* (Mar. 10, 1951).

By 1879, Ainslie's Wood became so popular that The Hamilton and Dundas Steam Railway officially started offering rail service to Ainslie's Wood. The steam train, named "The Dummy," ran through the south end of the farm. It was a little train of two or three cars pulled by a steam engine encased inside a cab, so as not to bother the horses on the farm. Its route originated at Ferguson Avenue and terminated in Dundas. In 1885, a railway company bought Ainslie's Wood to operate it as



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a park for the public and built a sports field for baseball, cricket, and lacrosse. Many local writers and reporters wrote about the woods and the happy times people spent there. However, by 1895 the park's popularity was waning because Canada Westinghouse built a railroad yard nearby.

Around 1920, Sir John Gibson, educator, lawyer, military man, and eventually lieutenant-governor of Ontario, bought Ainslie's Wood and kept the Ainslie name. After his death in 1929, Lady Gibson and her family donated part of the land to the Hamilton Parks Board, while the rest went to Hillfield School in memory of her late husband and three sons.

In 1961, the City of Hamilton sold 38.23 acres of Ainslie's Wood for \$67,345 to build the Chedoke Expressway, now Hwy 403 (the section between the Main Street East and Ancaster exits). Hillfield School moved to its present location on the mountain in 1963 and sold its part of the Ainslie property to the developers of the Camelot Towers Apartments and the Board of Education. The Board of Education built and opened the Ainslie

Wood Vocational School near the station end of the property in 1970. The school closed in 1994 due to funding difficulties. It was taken over by Columbia International College and renovated a few years ago to expand their school.

The contemporary Ainslie Wood

Park is not part of the original property. That park was officially given its name on Nov. 24, 1987, and is located on land in the Ainslie Wood area formerly owned by the Bowman and Bamberger families. Ainslie Avenue is south of Main Street West and runs from Bowman Street on the east to Clifford Street on the west.

The historical significance of Ainslie's Wood is indicated by the fact that a street is named for it, four of the six areas in Chedoke-Cootes (Ward 1) include the name Ainslie (Ainslie Wood North, Ainslie Wood East, Ainslie Wood, and Ainslie Wood West), and of course our community association contains the name Ainslie Wood.

Sources: *Hamilton Public Library's Special Collections and Mabel Burkholder's "Out of the Storied Past," The Hamilton Spectator, Mar. 10, 1951.*