

The Way We Were



Westdale shopping district, circa 1936

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A mystery campaign helped name Westdale

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Starting on Feb. 27, 1923 blotters bearing the mysterious words, "Did you ever name a baby?" were received in the mail by every subscriber in the Hamilton telephone directory.

Soon afterwards, billboards bearing the same message were plastered all over the city. Newspaper advertisements and panels in street cars also carried the same notice, with no explanation as to what it was all about.

The mystery was the talk of the city till March 14, 1923. On that date, all Hamilton telephone subscribers received another blotter in the mail. This blotter carried the same question, with the addition, "You name the McKittrick Properties and get \$200.00."

In June 1912, a powerful syndicate of investors, led by promoter J.J. McKittrick, appeared before city council with a proposal for the development of the lands west of the city limits, which ran along Dundurn Street at the time.

On a level plateau, west of the ravine through which Highway 403 now runs, the McKittrick syndicate proposed building a fully integrated suburban community, using all the latest trends in urban planning.

The city fathers welcomed the proposal and by January 1914, the McKittrick properties, which stretched as far as Cootes' Paradise, were annexed into the city.

The local effects of the First World War put a halt to the development, but soon after the war, the syndicate hired F. Kent Hamilton to forward the scheme.

The contest to name the "baby" suburb was promoted with a massive advertising campaign, trumpeting the virtues of living "where all the homes will be new homes - delightfully modern, the whole scene unmarred by a single old or unsightly house."

A March 20, 1923 ad in *The Spectator* claimed that "this delightful spot, only one and a half miles from the heart of our city, is undoubtedly the most desirable and comparatively the most valuable land within the limits of any city on this continent.

"Such a community must be fittingly named, must be given a name that will forever identify it as a distinctive part of the city. It being part of Hamilton, the people of Hamilton are going to name it."

"Among the names which have been suggested," said F. Kent Hamilton, "are Westhome, Vimy Ridge, Bridgeton, Woodlands Park, Surrey Park and Bridgeview." The name the company wishes is one that will be appropriate and not too long - one that can easily be remembered and will convey some idea of the location and the nature of the district.

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On March 29, 1923, a gala dinner, attended by local real estate agents and politicians, was held at the Royal Connaught Hotel to announce the winning name.

Marshall Lounsbury, one of the contest judges, told the gathering that 6,170 people had submitted entries, and that they had all been carefully considered. After much study, the judges had come to the conclusion that "Westdale" was the most appropriate suggestion.

"We think that we are naming a city," Lounsbury said. "In the future, Westdale will be just as important to Hamilton as Westmount is to the city of Montreal."

The winner was not immediately announced, although it was later revealed that Rev. Canon Percival Lawrence Spencer won the \$200.00 first prize.

The 1923 mystery campaign, followed by a request to all Hamiltonians to name their new western suburb, gave the developers of the McKittrick Properties a strong impetus to sell Westdale as one of the most desirable residential communities in Hamilton.