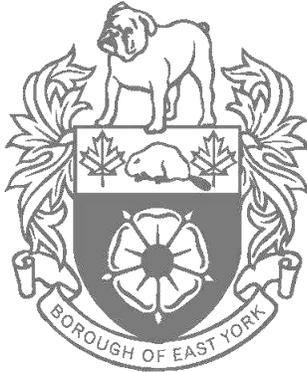


East York Tidbits

Stories About East York Presented by the East York Historical Society

THE STORY OF BILLY MCKAY

Its rare that ordinary citizens have the financial means or the enthusiasm to make contributions of land to their community. One such rare individual is Billy McKay 1862–1943, an East York farmer, born of Irish parents, in what is now the community of East York. His contribution of land in the early 1920s set the stage for the pattern of development of the eastern part of the old Township of York, creating a hub of public buildings at Coxwell Avenue and Mortimer Avenue to serve the community. His contribution of land may have played a significant role in the province's decision to establish the Township of East York in 1924.



In 1891, at the age of 29 Billy purchased farmland in the vicinity of Coxwell and Mortimer, near his father's farm. After many years of raising pigs for market, in 1921 at the age of 58 and still a bachelor, which he would remain all of his life, Billy decided to make donations of land to his community.

He donated the southwest corner of Coxwell and Mortimer to the Public School Board, Section 7, which would become the site of R.H. McGregor public school and the office of the East York Board of Education. The school site still exists and the old Board's office is the new Toronto East General Hospital Medical Building. Also in 1921, he donated the northwest corner of the intersection to York Township. The site would later become the home of the Township of East York municipal offices. Today it's the East York Civic Centre, Memorial Park and East York's war memorial cenotaph. Many veterans made East York their home after the second world war, and this site, especially the war memorial is treasured by long time East Yorkers.

In 1924, Billy sold 5 acres of his farm to the City of Toronto for the development of the new Toronto East General Hospital on Coxwell Avenue. At the same time Billy donated an additional one and half acres to the City for the hospital site. Since the opening of the hospital in 1927 it has undergone a number of expansions, and is today the mainstay of health care for citizens in east Toronto.

By the mid 1920s Billy had donated close to 12 acres of his land to benefit the community. The reasons for his generosity remain a mystery. Whatever his reasons, Billy's contribution are rare for a man of ordinary means and his passion to better his community is

worthy of recognition. In the late 1930's the remainder of Billy's farm was developed for housing of the type East York is famous for – no nonsense, solid wartime bungalows, built to last generations. To this day and well into Toronto's future, Billy has left his mark on the community of East York.

**Prepared by John Michailidis
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The East York Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and sharing information about East York's rich past. The Society meets 5 times a year usually on the last Tuesday in January, March, May, September and November.

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