

# Steal of a deal



STAFF PHOTO/NICK IWANYSHYN

Your township got half of Holland Marsh in exchange for a bridge / PAGE 16

## Marsh for train bridge? Good deal — in 1853

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Have you ever wondered why a portion of the Holland Marsh is in King Township?

After all, it's north of Hwy. 9, which serves as a divider for King and Bradford West Gwillimbury further west.

Even people who live in the marsh aren't entirely certain about why they are King residents.

"All I know is when the division happened, the river was used as the municipal boundary," former resident Harry Van der Kooij said.

There were always mutterings of some sort of deal that included King getting part of the marsh, but it happened so long ago, no one really knows the details, longtime marsh resident and former Ward 6 councillor Jack Rupke said.

What is indisputable is the municipalities are separated by the West Holland River.

So is there anything to this idea of a deal?

Yes indeed, Bradford West Gwillimbury Local History Association president Bill Marks said.

West Gwillimbury traded the land to York County in 1852 to get a Yonge Street train bridge built, he said.

Up to that point, trains could only go as far north as the river and opening up the north to commerce was important.

In 1836, the Upper Canada legislature passed a bill authorizing a railway from Toronto to Lake Simcoe, but the 1837 rebellion derailed that effort. In 1845, an act was passed to lengthen the railway and a final act was passed in 1849 establishing the Ontario, Simcoe and Huron Railway Company.

Simcoe County committed itself to raising £50,000 worth of capital for the project by selling debentures repayable over 20 years.

The decision was quite controversial, as

residents didn't want to provide taxes to a railway that was too far from them to be of any value.

As a result, a deal was struck that gave York County all the West Gwillimbury Land south of the Holland River, Mr. Marks said. That land stretched from the river to Yonge Street, where Upper Canada Mall now stands.

**'It was just a swamp. It was so noisy with frogs, one of the taverns was called the Bullfrog.'**

Bill Marks  
on the state of the Holland Marsh  
in the mid-19th century

Little did Simcoe County's leaders at the time know that the marsh would one day have massive agricultural value.

"It was just a swamp," Mr. Marks said. "It was so noisy with frogs, one of the taverns was called the Bullfrog."

It wasn't until William Day began to dig canals and drain the marsh in 1925 that it became of any value, Mr. Marks said.

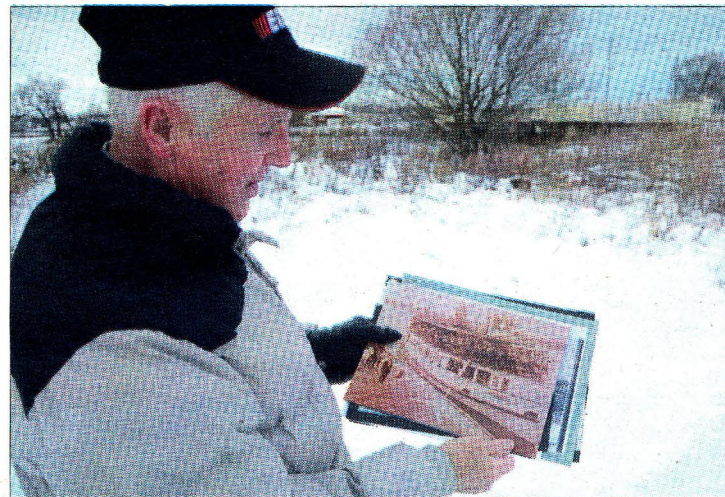
The first trip carrying passengers on the new rail bridge happened in 1853.

Bradford became an important village of farming and industry, Mr. Marks said, noting he was never able to find how much money York paid for the bridge.

So was it a fair deal?

"No, when you look at what's in the area now," Mr. Marks said.

In the end, York Region got a chunk of what is now Newmarket, East Gwillimbury and King, including part of the Holland Marsh, for a bridge.



STAFF PHOTO/NICK IWANYSHYN

Bradford West Gwillimbury Local History Association president Bill Marks shows historic photographs of the Holland Marsh, explaining how King Township got part of the marsh in exchange for a bridge into Bradford.