

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Hutchison House Museum

Dr. John Hutchison was one of Peterborough's earliest doctors and was an important member of the community. In 1836 a rumour began to circulate that the popular doctor was considering moving to another community with better housing and more opportunities for his growing family. Local legend has it that the local citizens worked together in order to build the house; farmers brought their teams to draw stone from the quarry northwest of the town site; stonemasons, carpenters, joiners, glaziers, and roofers gave their time; materials of all kinds were donated and work bees were held to get the work done. Architectural archaeology supports this theory as the structure indicates that the builders were not familiar with building technique or design. Also, when looking at the mouldings and baseboards in the house a number of differences in detail and workmanship were discovered, indicating that tradesmen and suppliers made their contributions in individual ways. The total cost of the project in actual money was reported to have been around 45 pounds sterling or \$244. Dr. Hutchison, his wife and their five young boys moved into the house early in 1837.

A number of private papers and documents relating to the doctor's activities survive, but the most intimate household details come from the family diary of Sandford Fleming. Sandford Fleming was a cousin of John Hutchison, whose later achievements included the role as a chief engineer of the Canadian Pacific Railway, designer of Canada's first postage stamp and inventor of standard time. A main floor bedroom is set aside to commemorate Fleming's stay in the house, and the map of Peterborough drawn by the young surveyor in 1846 is prominently displayed. Sandford at 18, had immigrated in 1845 and spent most of his first two years in Canada living with the Hutchison family in Peterborough. In his journal, a lifelong habit, he describes his first view of the settlement as a "rather poor little place...stumps of trees still in the middle to the streets, a wood house here & there, with a few good villas with verandas around in the suburb."

It is from Fleming's journals that we learn a great deal about the doctor's mode of practice. He mentions journeys the doctor made throughout the countryside visiting his patients in their homes, delivering babies, tending to injured lumbermen, occasionally conducting inquests into sudden deaths or carrying on his judicial duties. Some patients would also come to see the doctor at home. Social activities included parties, sleighing, skating on the pond, church bazaars and holiday celebrations.

The Hutchisons lived in the house until the doctor's death from typhus which he contracted after tending to the sick during the 1847 epidemic through Upper Canada. The house was sold to James Harvey and stayed in that family for the next 130 years. A brick addition was added to the rear of the house in the late 1860s, this section now houses meeting and exhibit rooms, book shop, modern kitchen and an accessible washroom on the lower level as well as a reference library, artefact storage, and the museum office on the upper level.

The stone house was bequeathed to the Peterborough Historical Society in 1969 by Jeannette Connal Brown, a great granddaughter of the second owner. A project was undertaken to restore the home to the 1830s and turn it into a living history museum. During the restoration process an old stone cooking hearth was revealed behind brick and plaster. Investigation of the many layers of paint and wallpaper in the parlour revealed that the last coat of plaster had been tinted so that the doctor's family could move in without waiting for the plaster to dry before painting. Many artefacts were found between the joists in the walls and under the floorboards including a collection of sewing needles, buttons, thimbles, fragments of medical texts, temperance papers, a brochure giving the account of the

1812 coronation of George IV, shoes, gloves, material scraps and bits of clothing (a child's bodice, a man's shirt and two lady's caps).