

Kinmount Historical Walking Tour

Explore Our Heritage ... Experience Our Charm

Prior to the arrival of European settlers, the area around Kinmount was inhabited by aboriginals belonging to the Iroquoian, Algonquin and Huron nations. In the 1850s, with settlements pushing ever northward, the Bobcaygeon Road reached the present site of Kinmount and with it brought prospectors in lumber and other natural resources as well as settlers. Although growth was slow in the beginning, with the coming of the railroad in 1876, Kinmount began to truly blossom. By the end of the 19th Century, the town of Kinmount boasted over 50 businesses and professionals and enjoyed particular prosperity. Lumber was the biggest industry. Yet, despite the significant economic prosperity enjoyed by the town in the decades flanking the turn of the 20th Century, it seemed that the town was fated to slide into decline.

Various socio-economic factors played a role in the evolution of the town and its citizens, but perhaps most significantly, it was the numerous natural disasters which shaped the physical form of the town most appreciably. Several fires claimed more than one business in the span of just a few decades; in 1942, a conflagration appropriately termed the “Great Fire” destroyed the train station, forever changing the façade of Kinmount. Floods, both minor and major have wreaked havoc upon the town as water overflowed the banks of the Burnt River. In 1928, a spring log jam resulted in a dramatic flood which saw locals taking to canoes as a means of transportation of the Main Street. However in spite of the many hardships faced by the town and its people, Kinmount has retained its gallant spirit and today has redirected its energies to meet with the challenges of the present and the future while never forgetting the valuable contributions of its past.

Featured Sites

1. Kinmount Railway Station, No.5 Station St.

The southern half of this venerable old building was constructed in 1876 to coincide with the arrival of the railroad in Kinmount. A baggage room was later added on the north side of the building in response to the need for greater space. The station itself was built according to a common blueprint used for many stations in the area, such as Haliburton. The building was a hub of the community as the railroad provided an important means of transportation, both of persons and freight, and communication, as mail could be delivered with greater ease and regularity by train.

In the early 1980s, the rail lines were abandoned and the station was purchased by the township of Somerville. It has since been home to the Kinmount Lions’ Club and the Senior Citizens- New Horizons Group. Today, the building houses a scale model of the rail line running between Kinmount and Haliburton, as well as a Tourist Information Centre. In the northern end of the building, the village Blacksmith plies his trade, carrying on a tradition that has deep roots in the historic town.

2. Icelandic Memorial Sculpture, Austin Sawmill Heritage Park,

Dedicated in 2000, this sculpture executed by Gudrun Sigursteindottir Girgis, was created to commemorate the ill-fated settlement of a group of Icelandic immigrants at Kinmount in 1874. Plaques in English, French and Icelandic on the base of the sculpture explain the tragic circumstances of the settlers and list the names of those who were among the unfortunate group.

3. Austin Sawmill

The present building was constructed in 1942 on the foundations of a previous sawmill which was destroyed by fire. The first mill established on this site was built in the 1890s and owned by William T. Craig and John Austin. In 1908, the original building burned to the ground and was replaced by the structure which succumbed to fire in the conflagration of 1942 which destroyed most of the town. The Lands formerly belonging to the Austin Sawmill now constitute the Austin Sawmill Heritage Park, opened in 1995.

4. New and 5. Old Baptist Churches, No. 4937 Cty. Rd. 45 & No. 4 Dickson St., respectively

The First services, of Baptist worship at Kinmount were held in 1877. One year later, with a congregation of 48 members, a church was built at the corner of Crego and Dickson St. In 1912, the congregation had dwindled so greatly they could no longer maintain a minister. In 1919, the congregation was dissolved and the church sold to the Masonic Order.

In 1933, Rev. Gillian of Bobcaygeon began holding services again in Kinmount and members of the local congregation reorganized to purchase a lot and built a new church which officially opened June 22, 1936. This building still stands, located on Dickson St., north of the present Community Centre. It is now a private home. In 1993, the Baptist congregation purchased the former Kinmount Public School which was renovated and reopened to hold services by September 1993.

6. Kinmount Community Centre, No. 2 Dickson St.

The present building was constructed in 1922 on site of the Old Forrester's Hall, following its destruction by fire. In 1950, the Township of Somerville purchased the building and in 1962, added the fire hall (little more than a garage) on its eastern side. The little fire hall continued in use until 1979, when the new fire hall was built on the south side of town next to the new cemetery. Until 1999, the mail building housed the public library in its basement. The library is now located in the former Township of Somerville Office building south of town. In its stead, the Kinmount and Area Artisans' Guild has established a market place. The main floor of the Community Centre continues to be used for various community events.

7. Watson-Hopkins House, No.5 Dickson St.

This stately Victorian-style home was constructed in the 1880s by local businessman Alexander Watson. Another local businessman, A.Y. Hopkins, owner of a block of stores on the mainstreet in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, later purchased the home. The multi-story red brick structure continues in use today as a private home, now fronted by towering majestic pines and surrounded by lush and beautiful gardens. The original wrought iron and concrete fencing which surrounded the property in the late 19th century is

still visible today.

8. Somerville Lodge #451, A.F & A.M No.5 Crego St.

The first Masonic Lodge in Kinmount was formed in 1901. Meetings were initially held in the upstairs of the Hopkins block of buildings on the west side of Main street. Some time around 1910, the lodge moved to a room in the Bowie Hotel, also located on Mainstreet. In 1919, the lodge moved to its present location at the corner of Crego and Dickson street, having purchased the buildings, a former church, from the Baptist congregation.

9. Cenotaph, Mainstreet

The cenotaph rests on the site of the house and store of Samuel Henry which burnt in 1922

in one of the many fires which have plagued the town. The vacant land was later donated to the town for the erection of a cenotaph to memorialize those brave citizens of Kinmount who perished in the First and Second World Wars, as well as the Korean War.

10. Highlands Cinemas, Cty.Rd. 121, just north of town

A unique treasure nestled on the edge of town, the Highland Cinemas began in 1979 with a single 50 seat theatre. It has grown to become a 5 theatre complex seating 550 people showing first-run movies. In addition, the complex boasts a museum which houses the largest collection of movie memorabilia in Canada. The theatres themselves form a special part of this collection, containing elements salvaged from historical theatres from across North America.

11. Bridge, Mainstreet

The first bridge at this location was built in 1858. At least four other bridges of timber and later iron were built to span the Burnt River at this site before the bridge of concrete and steel was built in 1956-1957. The bridge was later refurbished in 1994.

12. Old Courthouse and Jail, No. 5023 Cty. Rd. 45

This unimposing clapboard structure was first built in the 1890s as a gaol to house the criminals of Kinmount and area, though the crimes of those held there were certainly mild and usually of the petty kind, such as small theft or drunk and disorderly conduct. The jail was located in the stone basement of the building and the iron bars over the windows are still visible today. In 1962, the building came to be used as the offices for the Township of Somerville. Township administration continued here until 1990, when the offices were relocated to a new building south of town, constructed specifically to house the township offices. At this time the building was taken over by the Kinmount Community Police Committee and became a satellite office for the Lindsay O.P.P. (now the city of Kawartha Lakes detachment).

13. Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 441, No.Cty Rd. 45

Although the population of Kinmount was relatively small, a large number of brave young men and women volunteered their services in the First and Second World Wars. Because of this Kinmount was a likely location for a Legion Branch. The charter for the Kinmount Legion, John McGrath Branch 441, was granted in November of 1946. Members

purchased property from Walter Butts and the standing building on the lot was remodeled by volunteers; one year later it was officially opened for serving the Legionnaires and community. In 1957 a new building was completed on the site; this later building still stands and continues to be in use today.

14. Kinmount Fair Grounds, Cty. Rd. 45, east of town

The first Somerville Agricultural Fair was held in the nearby village of Coboconk in 1872. Ten years later the Galway merged and fairs were then held at Kinmount. About this time, the fair moved to its present location, east of town; formerly, it was held on the site of the “new” Kinmount cemetery on the south side of town. Today the fair has grown to enjoy a reputation as one of the best fairs in Ontario with something to offer everyone from midway rides to livestock shows, demolition derbies and craft exhibits, vendors, demonstrations, a pioneer exhibit, talent shows, live entertainment and on-site camping amount the majestic pines.

15. Junction of the Monck and Bobcaygeon Roads

The Bobcaygeon Road was an important artery of transportation for the early pioneer population and speculators. The Monck Road (now Cty Rd 45), built in 1866, was created primarily as a military route between Lake Couchiching and Ottawa to provide alternative transportation to the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence system should Canada come under attack by the Americans.

The junction of these two important roads at Kinmount helped propel the small community to growth and prosperity as they provided important means of transportation and communication.

16. Kinmount United Church, No.15 Cluxton St.

This building, initially housing the Presbyterian congregation of the town and also playing host to other denominations who lacked facilities in the early years of settlement, was first built in 1876. However no bell was to chime in its tower until almost 40 years later when a bell was donated by W.T. Craig, then co-owner of the Craig and Austin Sawmill. When the United Church of Canada was formed in 1952, the Presbyterians joined the United Church. The building consequently became the home of the newly formed United Church congregation in Kinmount. The adjacent manse was built in 1898 and occupied henceforth by a minister until 1950. The Church building was renovated in 1944 and 1978. Interestingly a manual pump organ purchased many years ago is still used today to provide music for worship services. In 1958, Kinmount became included in the Coboconk pastoral charge.

17. Orange Lodge, No.11 Cluxton St.

The first Lodge of the Orange Order at Kinmount was opened in 1886, on the site of the present Kinvale Restaurant on Mainstreet. When this building was destroyed by fire in 1890 it was rebuilt at the present location, next to the Presbyterian Church. A religious organization with strong political affiliations, the Orange Order flourished in Kinmount in the years prior to the First World War.

18. Kinmount House Bed and Breakfast, No.6 Cluxton St.

This home is recognized as one of the oldest buildings in Kinmount, although the date of its construction is not known. It was initially occupied by John Hunter, accredited as one of the founders of Kinmount. By 1900, it had been added on to and was owned by Fred Dettman, a prominent local businessman. In 1942, it was sold to Harry Butts who used it as a motel and boarding house. In 1986, it was purchased by its present owner, Patrick Healey, who now operates a charming Bed and Breakfast.

19. St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church, No. 4030 Cty. Rd. 121

The Catholic community of the Kinmount area was first served by visiting priests from outlying communities such as Downeyville and later Fenelon Falls. Prior to the construction of a church, masses were held in the old log school house, S.S. No. 4, in Galway, just south of the town. The first church, "The Immaculate Conception," was built in 1882 by the men of the congregation and located in Galway. In 1901, a house was built across the road from the church by Father M.J. O'Leary who moved the parish headquarters from Fenelon Falls to Galway where he took up residence.

In 1910, the red brick church on the hill was built under the new priest, Fr. Galvin, to service the growing Catholic community in Kinmount. Two years later, a rectory was completed next to the church. Galway's congregation joined Kinmount when the Immaculate Conception Church burnt on Easter Sunday, 1930.

20. Cemeteries, Cty Rd. 121, south end of town

The old Kinmount cemetery was first organized in 1862 when a one acre lot was purchased by John Hunter. Here, many of the pioneers of the community were laid to rest. When this cemetery was filled, a new cemetery was developed directly across the road. The Catholic cemetery in Kinmount came into use in 1937. Prior to this, a cemetery located beside the Immaculate Conception Church in Galway was used for internments.