

ERNIE BROWN'S MEMOIRES - THE MOUNTAIN VIEW HOTEL

Ernest Brown was born in Hamilton in 1879 and grew up on the mountain. In 1909 he moved west to work for the railroad, but when he retired he used his railroad pass to return to Mount Hamilton to visit relatives and friends. He never lost his affection for his boyhood home and wrote his recollections before dying in 1970. His memoirs are a very important addition to our Mountain heritage because he frequently provides descriptive details that have never before been recorded. The following news extract was found in the Hamilton Spectator under the heading Trinity Holds Social: "The Women's Auxiliary of Holly Trinity Church convened a congregational social in the Parish Hall. Among those present was Ernie Brown who contributed two harmonica selections to the program and gave an interesting address on his early experiences in the parish".



Photo courtesy Joan (Brown) Harrison

Ernie Brown with his harmonica c. 1930

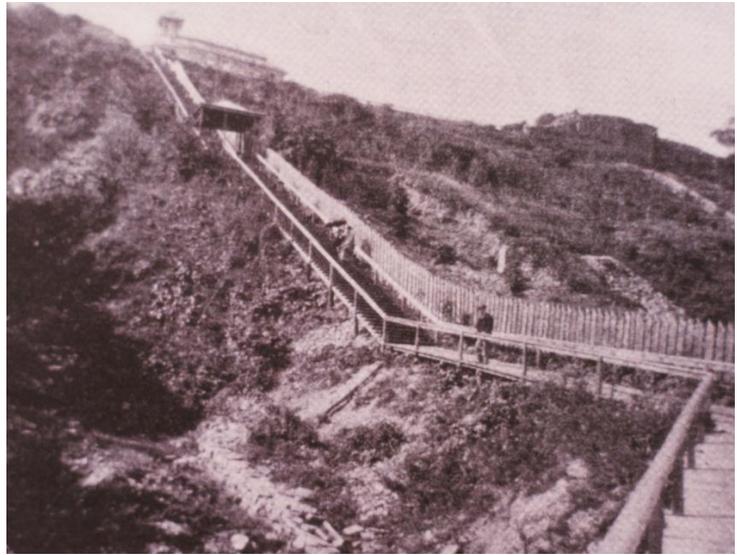


Photo source "Hamilton's Jubilee of Confederation 1927"

The Mountain View Hotel and James Street Mountain stairs c.1880

The following is part of Ernie's story. Around 1881 we moved into a frame cottage on the mountain brow owned by Mr. Powell, a florist who lived in a large two-story house with large greenhouses next to the Auchmar gatehouse. A stone's throw to the east stood the Mountain View Hotel, a three-story limestone building with a small roof garden and an observation tower with diamond shaped coloured glass windows and a tall flagpole. The tower provided a magnificent view of the city. In 1888 a large dancing pavilion with a roof supported by steel girders was added. The west wall was enclosed for a windbreak but the south side opened onto a large picnic ground. A high wire artist performed there. He dressed like a tramp and disrobed while standing on the high wire. He also balanced on two legs of a chair high above the crowd while playing the accordion.

A flight of two hundred pine steps, two inches thick and six feet long had been built down the escarpment from the front of the hotel. Half way down there was a ten-foot square shelter called the "cubby" house. At the foot of the steps was a washout spanned by a thirty-foot bridge. Another thirty steps brought you to the James Street level which was paved with cedar blocks on end.

Mountain Memories, written by historian, Robert Williamson on behalf of HMHS, appears monthly. See the Society's website (hamiltonheritage.ca) for information on events and publications.

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