

## NORWOOD PARK SCHOOL A MOUNTAIN HERITAGE CROSSROAD

Located only a city block from the central mountain intersection of Upper James and Mohawk Road, Norwood Park Elementary School finds itself in an area full of Hamilton Mountain heritage. For that reason, it was inevitable that the school would be chosen to participate in the City of Hamilton's heritage plaque school program. It is a public relations activity designed to give students a sense of ownership of their neighbourhood's heritage. Whenever the city's Historical Board installs a plaque at a heritage site, a smaller facsimile, made of light composite material is presented to the local school for permanent display. It provides the school with a heritage hero or a kind of admirable mascot.

The following Mountain schools have already received copies of heritage plaques that have recently been unveiled in their neighbourhoods: Sacred Heart School - "The Black Community of Hamilton Mountain"; Rousseau School - "The Mills of Ancaster"; and Regina Mundi School - "The Rymal Family History". Now, Norwood Park School will receive a copy of a plaque about one of Canada's outstanding artists, **William Blair Bruce**. The donation of part of his art collection to the City of Hamilton by his family, gave rise to the creation of the Art Gallery of Hamilton in 1914. The plaque was unveiled at the Art Gallery and installed in Bruce Park, the former site of the home of Hamilton's greatest painter just northeast of the intersection of Upper James and Fennell Avenue.

There are many other great family names associated with the central mountain. The school itself sits on part of a large United Empire Loyalist land grant given to the family of **Michael Hess**. It dates back to 1788 when a group of Loyalists, including Michael Hess and William Rymal, formed an advanced party to scout opportunities to resettle their families in Upper Canada away from the harassment of their American Revolutionary neighbours in Pennsylvania. They all settled along the Mohawk Trail on today's Hamilton Mountain.

Another famous Hamiltonian associated with Norwood Park is **Robert McElroy**. He arrived in Canada from Ireland in 1838 and became a prominent contractor. His firm constructed a section of the Great Western Railway, the first railway built through Hamilton in 1854. In 1852, McElroy married into the Hess family and took possession of a portion of the Hess property on the north side of today's Mohawk Road from West 5th to Warren Avenue,

extending north to McElroy Road. He lived in a large two-storey stone home on a knoll facing Mohawk Road where the Canadian Tire Auto Service Centre is today. His ultimate claim to fame was that he served three terms as a city alderman and as Hamilton's mayor from 1862-64.



*Painting by John R. Gallagher courtesy John B. Gallagher.*

*In 1842, the grandson of Michael Hess built and operated a stage coach inn on the southwest corner of the Caledonia Road (Upper James) and Mohawk Trail. Later, from 1961-1976 it was the site of the Mountain's first drive-in restaurant known as the Millionaire Drive-Inn.*



*Photo courtesy Hamilton Public Library Special Collections*

*The crossroads of the Caledonia Road (Upper James) and Mohawk Road looking east, shows McElroy's large stone home (centre background) and wooden barn, twenty years after he died in 1867. The building on the extreme right is the home and control booth of a toll road collector.*

*Mountain Memories, written by historian **Robert Williamson** on behalf of the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society, appears monthly in the Mountain News. View the Society's website ([Hamiltonheritage.ca](http://Hamiltonheritage.ca)).*