

## CONCESSION STREET HERITAGE MURALS

By Robert Williamson

In 2018, as part of its mandate, the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society (HMHS) agreed to sponsor a giant historical wall mural in conjunction with a Concession Street Business Improvement project. Several such murals are planned to enliven the business area. Opie's Quality Meats at 612 Concession Street already has a mural on its East 24<sup>th</sup> corner wall. The site selected by HMHS is the second storey west wall of the former Royal Bank Building, now the new home of the Cancer Assistance Program. The sight lines overlooking the spacious parking lot on the corner of Concession Street and Summit Avenue are excellent.

The HMHS chose an impressive 1929 post card image from the Shay McWhinnie Collection showing the Wentworth Street Incline Railway at the height of its success providing service to the rapidly growing community of Mount Hamilton on the picturesque mountain brow. Residents were able to easily access employment in the lower city or attend the newly opened Stinson Street School or Hamilton Collegiate Institute.

Even by today's standards, the incline railway had to have been a most imposing sight. Proposed and built by John W. Lake, it began operation on August 26, 1895. Originally operated by a steam engine with a tall chimney, it converted to hydro electric power in 1916. Connected by a cable, the two incline cars were counter balanced and required only a small amount of power to operate up and down the escarpment face.



The two storey brick terminal building on the lower left is located between two very busy railway crossings as indicated by the two sets of gate arms. The T. H. & B. to Buffalo and Port Maitland is in the foreground and the Grand Trunk (former Hamilton and Lake Erie Railway) to Caledonia and Port Dover crosses at the bottom of the incline and set of stairs.

When the city spent money to build the Sherman Cut road access in 1931 without any compensation for the incline railway, it went into financial decline and ceased operating in 1936. In other words, the progress in road and automobile transportation put the unique incline railway system out of business. No amount of lobbying could change the mind set at city hall. For an estimated 2,500 mountain residents without an automobile, being forced to use the stairs was either a "let down" or a "comeuppance". The system was dismantled in 1949 and Hamilton's one-of-a-kind transit system was lost forever.