

INNISVILLE

Not Ennisville¹ or Innisfil²

The village of Innisville, set astride Highway-7 where it crosses the Mississippi River between Perth and Carleton Place, was once known as Freer's Rapids, or Freer's Falls³, taking its original moniker from Captain Noah Freer (1783-1868)⁴.

During the American War of 1812-1814, Freer, an officer of the Nova Scotia Fencible Infantry, was seconded to serve as Military Secretary to Lieutenant-General Sir George Prevost (1767-1816), Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of British forces in British North America 1811-1815. In recognition of his services to the Crown, in June 1817 he was ticketed 800 acres⁵ of 'waste land' at the Perth Military Settlement, including Drummond Township C-11/L-20.⁶ That 200-acre lot is bisected diagonally by the Mississippi River including, in its eastern corner, a 500-meter stretch of rapids, to which he was also granted the water rights.

It is most unlikely Captain Freer ever laid eyes on Freer Falls. There is no record that he ever visited the Perth Settlement, but settlement duties on the lot were completed⁷ and Freer received a Patent (Deed) for the property in 1821. Shortly thereafter a site on the north bank of the rapids was occupied by James Ennis Sr. (1784-1864)⁸ who, by 1824, had dammed the rapids and constructed a grist (flour) mill. Ennis appears to have initially leased the mill site, but in October 1835 he purchased the full lot and water rights from Freer for £250.

James Ennis Sr. had been born in County Cavan, Ireland, where he married (c1814) Ellen Baker and fathered three children⁹. Ennis emigrated to Upper Canada at about the same time as his brother John (b.1794) who, in 1821, was granted Lanark Township C-10/L-1 under the Lanark Society Settler scheme.¹⁰ According to a number of undocumented sources, for several years James Ennis would come to Canada in the spring, work with his brother on the Lanark Township land, and then return to Ireland for the winter. More likely he made only one return trip to Ireland, to collect his family, because by about 1824 he had built his dam and mill at Freer's Rapids. Ellen Baker-Ennis died at Innisville in the late 1840s and in 1850 James married Catherine Buell (1818-1890). They became the parents of three children.¹¹

¹ A village in Pennsylvania, USA.

² A town in Simcoe County, Ontario.

³ 'Freer's' was sometimes spelled 'Fryer's'.

⁴ Captain Noah Freer was born in London, England, and died at Montreal.

⁵ The acreage allowed for the rank of Captain.

⁶ Freer also drew land in the Townships of Burgess, Bathurst and Elmsley.

⁷ Clearing and fencing five acres of land, erecting a house/shanty, opening 65-foot the road allowance across the front of the lot. In Freer's case the work was probably carried out by hired labor, if carried out at all.

⁸ Born in County Cavan, Ulster, Ireland.

⁹ James (1815-1856), Margaret (1816-1851), Eleanor (1829-1905).

¹⁰ James Ennis' brothers, Arthur (1791-1871) and David (1793-1847), and a cousin, Arthur, followed him to Canada in later years. His brothers settled in Bathurst Township and built lumber and grist mills at Fallbrook.

¹¹ Margaret (1851-1926), William (b.1853), Thomas (b.1856).

James Ennis' dam crossed the river where the Highway-7 bridge stands today. The first bridge, completed in about 1830, spanned the river a few yards downstream from the dam. It was a 365-foot wooden structure, 16-feet wide, supported on five stone piers. After several renovations over its 80-year life, in 1913 the wooden structure was replaced by a six-span, single lane, steel bridge with a cement deck, installed atop concrete piers and abutments, at a cost of \$16,000. The modern concrete bridge was built in 1958.



Innisville Bridge and Dam c1907

Photo by Edwin Lester Brittain, courtesy of the Canadian Museum of History

James Ennis also built Innisville's first hotel and within a few years, as a village began to grow up around his mill, Freer's Falls became better known as Ennisville. As the community continued to grow, it expanded to the north into Drummond C-11/L-21(W), a lot ticketed to Andrew Caswell in 1816.¹² In 1850 the village had a population of about 200, at a time when the population of Lanark Village stood at 350, Carleton Place 600, and Perth 2,500.

By the time James Ennis Jr. (1815-1856) took over his father's business in the early 1850s it had expanded to include an oat mill, sawmill, shingle mill and hotel. However, James Jr. died in 1856, at age 41, leaving the mills to his seven-year-old son John (1849-1911). As John was underage, his maternal grandfather, James Jackson (1787-1867), ran the business on his behalf for over a decade. James Jackson was also the local Justice of the Peace.

¹² A native of Ireland, Caswell arrived at the Perth Military settlement via the United States accompanied by a wife and two sons and a daughter under age 12. On December 9, 1816, he was ticketed for Drummond C-11/L-21(A) and C-4/L-9(SW).

The Ennis sawmill was originally equipped with only a single vertical (up-down) saw but it served to provide building materials for the area's earliest settlers. That saw was later replaced by a circular saw and by the 1860s the Ennis mills were producing 12,000 board-feet of lumber and 20,000 shingles daily and hauling the output by wagon to the Perth Railway Station.¹³



Map from H. Belden & Co. *Historical Atlas of Lanark & Renfrew Counties 1880-1881*

When his grandfather died in 1867, John Ennis, having turned 18-years-of-age that year, assumed ownership of the mills and operated the business until he leased them to John A. Code (1849-1932) in 1876. The mills burned in 1882 and shortly thereafter John Ennis moved to Sarnia where he opened a grocery business.

During its halcyon days in the mid 19th century, although the village carried the name of the Ennis family, of equal or greater importance to its prosperity were the Code family.

¹³ The Brockville & Ontario (B&O) Railway reached Perth in January 1859.

In about 1818 cabinet maker John Code Sr. (1785-1868) emigrated to Canada from County Wicklow, Ireland, with his wife Margaret Ann Nugent (1792-1858) and infant daughter Ann (1817-1903). Finding work in his trade at Montreal, Code remained there until 1820 when he and his family, by then including son William (1819-1868), joined a party of Lanark Society Settlers bound for Upper Canada and the newly opened townships¹⁴ immediately north of the original Perth Military Settlement. The Codes drew land at Drummond Township C-8/L-27 near Scotch Corners and later purchased property from James Ennis on the south bank of the Mississippi River at Freer's Rapids.¹⁵

Over the following seven years John and Margaret Code added two more daughters and four more sons to their family. John Code Sr. was the first of the family to establish a mill at Innisville when he built a carding mill¹⁶ in 1838, but he hired Isaiah Boyce (1790-1869)¹⁷ to run the business and dedicated himself to his farm. Four of his sons, however, William (1819-1868), George (1821-1904), Thomas (1823-1904) and Abraham B. (1828-1898), would play a leading role in the economic development of the village.¹⁸

William Code, born during his family's sojourn at Montreal, was apprenticed to wagon and carriage maker John Graham (1812-1887) at Carleton Place. Having qualified as a journeyman, he worked for a time at Prescott and Kingston and then returned to Innisville where he established his own wagon manufacturing workshop. He also built coffins for the district, described by his son as "*uninviting receptacles covered with black cloth, the best of them not inviting*".¹⁹ William later built Innisville's second hotel, leased to James Hugh Young (1842-1896), and operated a farm near the village.²⁰

Abraham B. Code served his apprenticeship as a carder in the woolen mills of James Rosamond (1805-1894) at Morphy's Falls (Carleton Place). In 1856 he formed a partnership with his brother George and established the 'A. & G. Code' woolen mill, installing their machinery in a building custom built and leased to them by James Ennis Sr. at the south end of his dam. They began by producing coarse cloth, mostly etoff,²¹ but within a few years were manufacturing blankets, primarily for sale to the timber shanties. 'A. & G. Code' also operated their father's carding mill, producing carded rolls for home spinning.

¹⁴ The Townships of South Sherbrooke, Dalhousie, Lanark and Ramsay.

¹⁵ John Code Sr.'s brother, Thomas Code (1775-1852), with wife Elizabeth Twamley (1778-1839) and family, located on Lanark Township C-12/L-3&4 near Boyd's settlement at about the same time.

¹⁶ A carding mill prepares wool for spinning by cleaning and brushing the fibers to evenly align them in preparation for spinning into yarn.

¹⁷ Brother-in-law of Daniel Shipman (1791-1853), miller and founder of Shipman Falls (Almonte).

¹⁸ John Jr. (1820-1868) carried on the family farm at Drummond, C-8/L-27 and Richard (1824-1891) ran a carding mill at Perth before moving to Winnipeg and establishing a livery business there. Daughters Ann (1817-1903), Ellen (1826-1911) and Elizabeth 'Bessie' (1828-1911) never married and lived their lives on the family farm.

¹⁹ c1929 letter from Thomas A. Code (1854-1937) to Andrew Haydon (1867-1932), Canadian Senator and author of *Pioneer Sketches in the District of Bathurst* (1925).

²⁰ William Code was the father of Thomas Alfred Code (1854-1937) who founded Code's Mill at Perth that over the years manufacture blankets, knitwear and felt.

²¹ From the French '*Étoffe du Pays*', a coarse homespun of natural gray wool.

In addition to his business interests, Abraham Code served for many years as Reeve of Drummond Township and in an 1867 by-election he was elected to the Provincial Legislature for South Lanark, defeating John G. Haggart (1836-1913).²² He held the seat until 1871.



Abraham Code (1828-1898)

When the Mississippi Navigation Company was incorporated in 1869, Abraham Code was one of its four founding directors.²³ With an authorized capitalization of \$100,000 the venture proposed to build locks at Innisville and Fergusons Falls to open navigation as far upriver as Lanark and Playfairville. The plan was to ship manufactured cloth, sawn lumber, and iron ore²⁴ by barge to Carleton Place for onward shipment by rail. A company steamboat, the *Enterprise*, was launched in October 1869 but no locks were ever built and the scheme collapsed in the spring of 1872.

The *Enterprise* was not the first steamboat on that part of the Mississippi River, however, that honor goes to the *Mississippi*, launched in 1867. In an age of appalling road conditions, over the following decades the 10 miles of water between Innisville and Carleton Place was plied by a dozen steamboats hauling freight and passengers, towing barges or carrying excursion parties to Sunday afternoon picnics.²⁵

In 1866 Abraham and George Code dissolved their partnership. George continued to operate the Innisville woolen mill with a new partner, George Crain (1841-1920).²⁶ Abraham purchased the Ferguson Fall's mill property (sawmill, oat mill, grist mill) of Robert Blair (1812-1891) with a plan to add a woolen mill to the complex. This proved a doomed venture, however. The Ferguson's Falls mills were at the center of a long-standing dispute over the flooding of farmland and damage to the upstream mill of Colonel William Playfair (1799-1868) created by the associated dam. The sawmill machinery was repeatedly sabotaged by spikes driven into the sawlogs and in 1871 the grist mill was burned down by arsonists. Shortly after the arson attack, in response to petitions from aggrieved farmers, the Provincial Government intervened, and the dam was torn out.²⁷



²² Haggart was also a miller with mills at Perth. In 1872 he was elected to the Federal Parliament. He sat as an MP for four decades and held the cabinet posts of Postmaster General and Minister of Railways and Canals.

²³ The other directors were Robert Bell (1808-1894), John George Craigie (1831-1910) and Robert Crampton (1835-1878) of Carleton Place and James H. Dixon of Peterborough.

²⁴ In addition to the woolen and sawmill at Innisville, and a sawmill at Ferguson's Falls, there were sawmills and an iron mine at Playfairville.

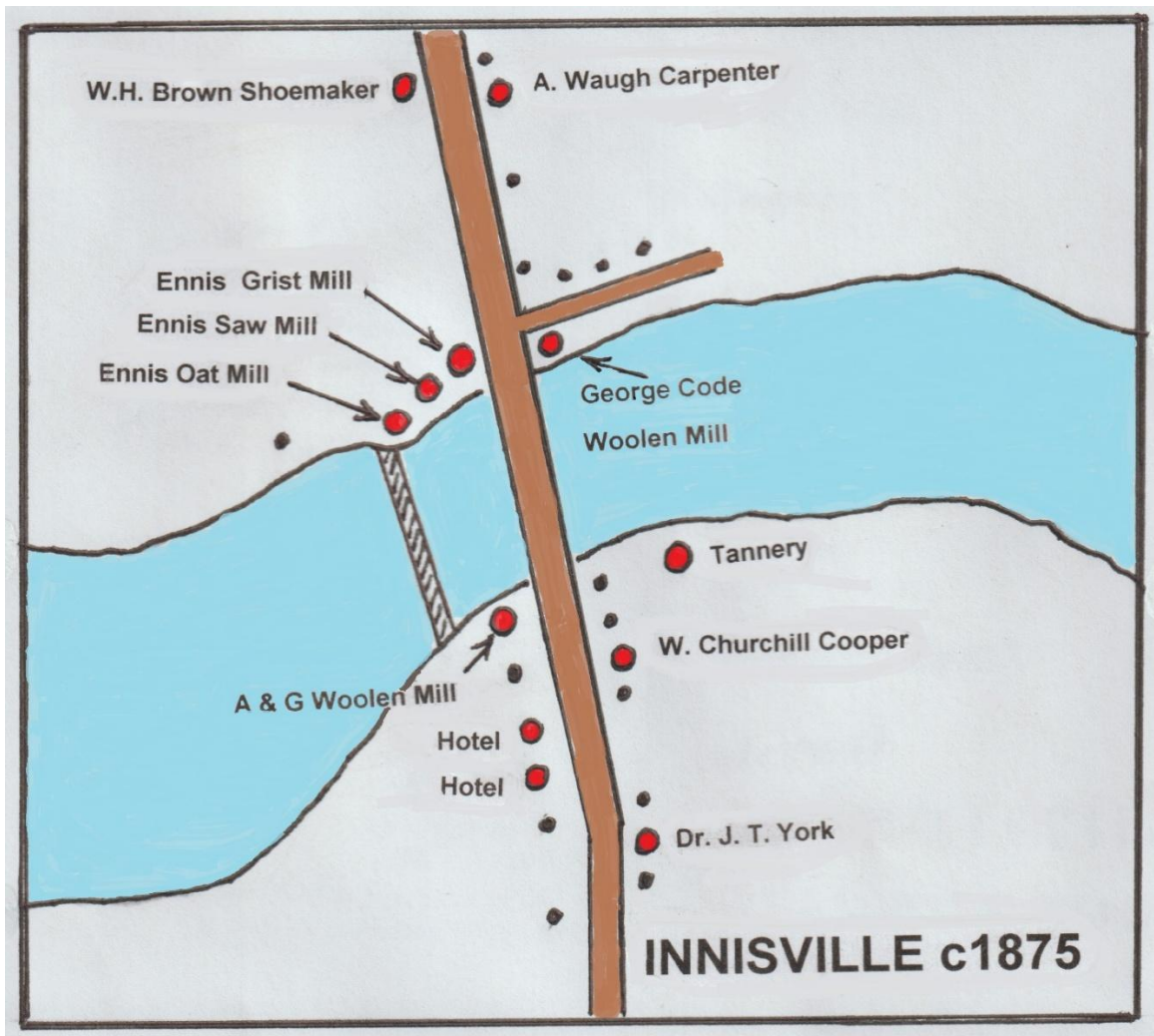
²⁵ In the 1870s through the 1890s there were the *Witch of the Wave*, *Morning Star*, *Ripple*, *Mayflower*, *Commodore*, *Carleton*, *Lillian B.*, and others.

²⁶ George Crain was an Ottawa building contractor and brickyard owner.

²⁷ See Ferguson's Falls: Richard Ferguson aka George R. Ferguson elsewhere on this website <https://www.perthhs.org/documents/fergusons-falls.pdf>

Milling at Ferguson's Falls having come to an end, in 1874 Abraham built the Hawthorn Woolen Mill at Carleton Place, the first steam powered mill on the Mississippi River, but that enterprise went bankrupt in 1878. Abandoning further entrepreneurship, Abraham secured a federal government civil service position as Inspector of Weights and Measures at Ottawa.

George Code, who had been Abraham's partner in the 'A&G Code Woolen Mill' at Innisville, also operated the Code carding mill and a grist mill. When the Code partnership was dissolved in 1866, and Abraham's place was taken by George Crain, the Code & Crain Woolen Mill added 'Halifax Tweed' to its production.



From 1868 the woolen mill was managed by George Code's nephew John A. Code (1849-1932), son of William (1819-1868). In 1872, however, the mill was badly damaged by fire and John left for the American west. When he returned from Montana four years later, he formed a partnership with a former employee named Sam Spender and leased the John Ennis flour and sawmills. He operated those mills until they burned in 1882. John Code was later appointed Treasurer of Lanark County.

In 1875 George Code closed the south bank woolen mill he and his brother had built in 1856 and, forming a new partnership with Archibald McArthur (1816-1884),²⁸ built a new woolen mill on the north bank, across the road from the Ennis mills. Machinery from the old mill was sold and moved to the Moorhouse, Dodds & Co. mill at Glen Tay²⁹. When George Code moved to Perth a short time later, management of the new factory was placed in the hands of another nephew, Thomas Alfred Code (1854-1937).³⁰

The inactive Code mill on the south bank, partly burned in 1872, was destroyed in 1879 in a conflagration that also consumed Abraham Code's home and William Code's hotel.



Innisville bridge, former Code woolen mill right, ruins of Ennis grist mill left

In 1892 the Code Woolen Mill at Innisville was sold to John T. Fairgrieve & Son³¹ and the new owners were soon advertising cloth, blankets, flannel and stocking yarn, but the spring freshet of 1893 destroyed the flume and took away part of the dam bringing production to a halt. Unable to finance repairs, Fairgrieve was declared insolvent and, at a sheriff's sale in August, Robert Berryman (1847-1907)³² of Hamilton paid \$2,275 for the mill building, machinery and waterpower. For the next few years, the mill was operated by James B. Ferguson but seems to have gone out of business before 1900.

²⁸ Archibald McArthur was a Carleton Place merchant.

²⁹ The former Adams mill.

³⁰ In 1876 Thomas A. Code moved to Perth where, beginning with a small carding mill at the Haggart dam, he built a business that, over the years, produced yarn, blankets, knitted socks, mitts, and felt at the Code Mill on the corner of Herriott and Wilson Streets. He also served as Perth Mayor 1889-1890.

³¹ John Thomas Fairgrieve (1836-1904) emigrated from Scotland to Waterloo County, Ontario, and later moved to Lanark County where he had interests in woolen mills at Glen Tay and Port Elmsley.

³² Born in England, Robert Berryman was a Hamilton, Ontario, wool dealer and corn merchant. He died at Boston, Massachusetts, USA.

As a young man Thomas Code was a 'forty-niner', leaving Innisville in 1849 or 1850 to seek his fortune in the California gold fields.³³ When he returned home a few years later, no richer than he left, he purchased the Innisville General Store from Michael Murphy (1805-1884), an acquisition that included the job of postmaster as the post office was located in the store. As Innisville began to fall on hard times from the late-1870s, Thomas returned to the west, this time to homestead near Brandon, Manitoba. The store later became McGarry's Hotel, operated by James Hugh Young and then by David Ennis (1842-1894), a son of James Ennis Jr. It was demolished in 1945. In 1891 David Ennis also built a hash mill (producing livestock feed) at Innisville, run by miller Jonathan Elliott.

As the population of the surrounding townships expanded through the mid 19th century, and the Ennis and Code mills prospered, the flow of farmers having their grain ground, timber sawn, and wool carded or woven attracted craftsmen and small service industries to establish along the river's shores. Robert Hughes Sr. (1812-1863) set up the village's first blacksmith shop, a business sustained by his sons Johnathan (1842-1938) and Robert Jr. (1845-1911); cooper William Churchill (1816-1899) manufactured barrels for packing and shipping pork to the lumber shanties, as well as butter churns, firkins³⁴, washtubs and wooden buckets. W. H. Brown established a shoemaking and tannery business; John Murphy opened a general store (later operated by Thomas Code). The village also boasted a tailor, a tavern and a foundry, producing plow points.

From 1854 the village was a market town with a twice annual livestock fair. The cattle were mostly purchased by Ottawa drovers and driven all the way to the city until the Canada Central Railway was built from Carleton Place to Ottawa in 1870.

Innisville also had its own doctor. As recalled more than a half century later by Thomas A. Code, Dr. John Thomas York's (1801-1868)

*... principal remedies were bleeding and pills – or 'pulls' as he called them. This together with pulling teeth was his chief practice. The forceps used were more like blacksmith's tongs ... and the victim was lucky if more than one tooth did not come at a time. John Code claims he went through the ordeal and lived to tell. He was laid on the broad of his back on the floor with a third party to hold him down.*³⁵

Most amusements of the day were those common to the rest of rural Upper Canada, penny readings, school and church concerts, barn raisings, logging, corn husking and apple pairing bees, followed in the evening by dancing. "*The boys were good step dancers: they developed it by practising on the barn floor on rainy days*".³⁶ Horse racing was also popular and Innisville had its own unique event. On winter race days, a course was plowed on the river ice between Innisville and Ferguson's Falls.

³³ Travelling with Nathaniel McCaffrey (1817-1888) of Carleton Place.

³⁴ A small barrel for shipping butter, each held about 100 pounds.

³⁵ Thomas A. Code letter to Andrew Haydon, 1929.

³⁶ Ibid.

Fishing the river was both a recreation and part of the annual food harvest; netting catfish, hooking eels in the mill sluice box and spearing suckers. During the spring sucker run, people came from miles away to fill gunny bags with the fish. *“After dressing, the suckers were put in brine, then dried, and when cured provided the ‘finnan haddie’³⁷ for the winter”.*³⁸



Innisville Iron Bridge, built 1913

In the 20th century, the annual spring run of spawning Pickerel drew hundreds of spectators (and scofflaw spearmen) to Innisville. Pickerel were not native to the Mississippi River system, but in the first decade of the 20th century stocking began. Over the next 20 years the Carleton Place Fish & Game Club continued to stock the lake and river and by the 1930s the spring spawning run of hundreds of thousands of fish out of the lake was so huge that in their struggle to climb the rapids fish knocked each other out of the water onto the riverbanks. From the late 1940s to the early 1960s the spectacle was such a popular attraction that the Ontario Department of Lands & Forests established a patrolled viewing area along the south shore in an effort to ensure that people did not scoop pickerel out of the water by hand or spear. By 1970, however, for reasons still subject to debate, Innisville’s famed pickerel run had disappeared.

The Ennis and Code families, and many of the other families who created Innisville, were mostly protestant Irish, either adherents of the Church of England (Anglican) or Methodists. The first church to serve the community was a log building, shared by both denominations, built in 1854 at Boyd’s Corner, three miles (five kilometres) north of the village. It was replaced by Trinity Anglican Church, a frame structure built in the village in about 1880, and then by St. John’s Anglican Church built in 1911³⁹ near the site of the old log church at Boyd’s Corner.

³⁷ A Scottish dish, Finnan haddie is a haddock that has been cured with the smoke of green wood or peat.

³⁸ Thomas A. Code letter to Andrew Haydon, 1929.

³⁹ St. John’s at Boyd’s closed in 2023.

When the new church was built (St. John's), some of the money was raised by each farmer agreeing to raise a calf for the purpose. These calves were sold as two-year-olds by the late Charles Hollinger [1869-1945], auctioneer, and a good sum of money was raised in this manner".⁴⁰

Trinity Church was taken down in 1922 and reassembled at Ferguson's Falls to serve as a community hall.

As could only be expected of a community formed by Protestants from the southeastern counties of Ireland, Innisville also had an Orange Hall, built in 1880.

A post office opened at Innisville in 1851, under direction of its first Postmaster, Michael Murphy, and was located in Murphy's store. Something went awry during the process of registering the new outlet with the national postal authorities, however. The intent had been to register the postal address as 'Ennisville', the name by which the community had been known for over two decades. However, the chosen name was somehow mis-spelled as 'Innisville' and the post office bureaucracy proved too inflexible to make a correction. From 1851 forward, Ennisville would be known as Innisville.⁴¹

Nevertheless, thirty years later the Drummond Township map in the Belden & Co. *Historical Atlas of Lanark & Renfrew Counties 1880-1881*, still spelled the name as 'Ennisville' while recording that the village contained "two stores, church, school, hotel, two woolen mills⁴², grist mill, sawmill, shingle mill, foundry, etc., and possesses a magnificent waterpower".

Those who served as subsequent postmasters represented the names of Innisville's founding families -- Thomas Code (1858), John James (1882), David James Ennis (1883), William H. Churchill (1888), etc.



Trinity Anglican Church

Details of the first village school at Innisville are sparse, except that it was a small log structure built in about 1848 on a site to the rear of its replacement. The second school, Drummond SS #17, was built in 1863 and served the elementary education requirements of the area until closing 1967, a period of 104 years. Shortly after it closed, the schoolhouse became the 'Innisville & District Museum' but closed in 2007 when its collection was moved to the Lanark & District Museum in Lanark Village. The school stands abandoned today.

⁴⁰ *In Search of Lanark*, by Carol Bennett (1982).

⁴¹ The name would result in much misdirected mail due to confusion between 'Innisville' post office in Lanark County and 'Innisfil' post office in Simcoe County (opened 1841).

⁴² Only one of which was operable.



Innisville School, Drummond SS # 17

During more than a half-century between about 1835 and 1895, countless millions of board feet of timber, felled along the vast Mississippi and Clyde River systems to the west, passed downriver through Innisville. In the earliest days it was squared timber bound for Quebec City and later it was sawlogs destined for the mills of John Gillies (1811-1888), Peter McLaren (1831-1919) and Boyd Caldwell (1818-1888) at Carleton Place.

In the winter cutting season, supplies of flour, pork, blankets, oats, hardware, tools, etc. were hauled to the shanties up the Mississippi-Clyde River valley by teamsters from the mills and workshops of Innisville.

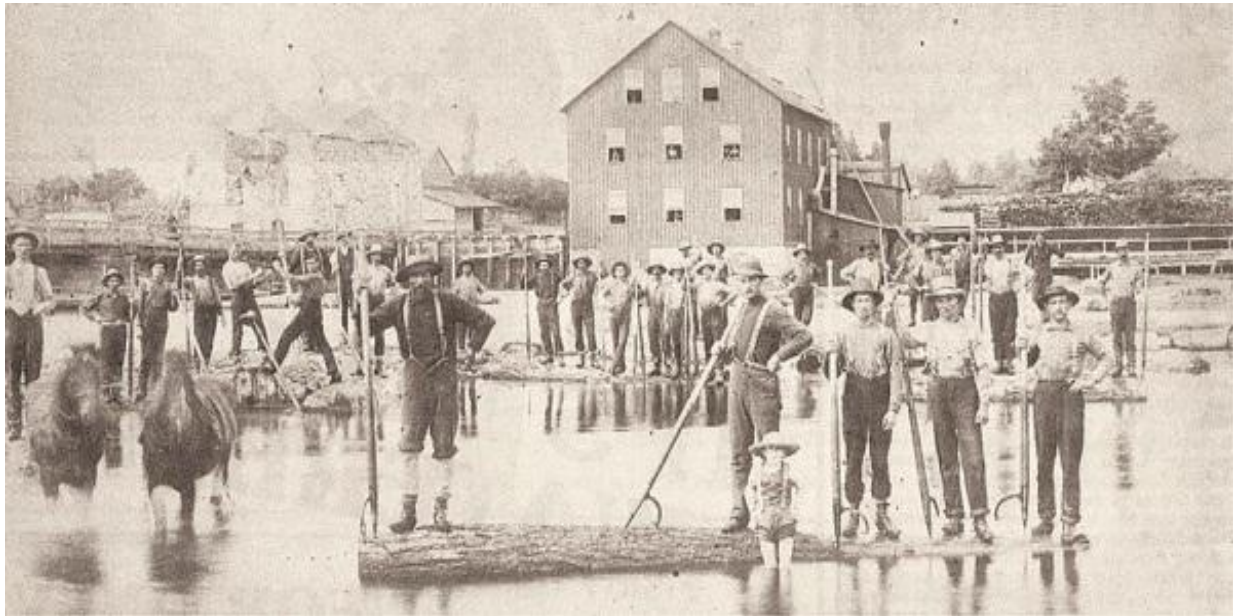
In the spring, the logs from all the shanties were brought down from the headwaters together. When the drives arrived at Innisville each spring, they brought with them gangs of river drivers to wrestle the logs through the slide over the dam without jamming, and then to sort them according to ownership on the still water below the bridge. The men camped along the riverbank, ate at the hotels, bought supplies at the store, drank, danced and brawled in the tavern, and generally brought much excitement to the village.

In 1883 Caldwell alone sent 800,000 logs through Innisville, while McLaren drove through enough logs to saw 20 million board-feet of lumber that year. Just one 1888 drive contained 150,000 logs.

By the turn of the century, however, industrial Innisville had disappeared.

The days when nearly a million logs passed down the Mississippi did not last. *“It was said that there was enough timber up the Mississippi to last one hundred years. But with the coming of the settlers and the loose handling of the brush, fire wrought destruction, and little was left in 20 years but the gleanings”*.⁴³

The disappearance of adjacent lumbering, combined with improvements in transportation, had much to do with the demise of the Innisville of the mid 19th century.



A crew of river drivers at Innisville c1885. The Code woolen mill is in the center background and the burned-out ruins of Ennis grist mill is at the left, with the wooden bridge passing between them.

In 1882 the Ennis mills, including the sawmill, burned and were not rebuilt. Even before the original Code woolen mill had suffered the same fate in the 1870s, the economics of woolen manufacture had vastly changed. The center of production in Lanark County had shifted to Almonte, Carleton Place and Perth, close to the railway. Without the Ennis and Code mills drawing traffic to the village, the peripheral workshops and services faded away. As early as 1878 the Innisville iron foundry was moved to Port Elmsley, and then to Perth.⁴⁴

In the early 20th century, the Mississippi River and Lake began attracting tourists and summer cottages sprung up along the river where mills once stood, but for much of year the village had become little more than a mile or two of reduced speed limit on Highway-7. An automotive service station and garage opened in 1927 and, with a small store added later, operated into the 1970s when it too burned. It was replaced by a new gas station and general store that included an LCBO outlet. A restaurant and take-out opened on the site of the former service station. A Ministry of Transport roadside park lies between the two.

- Ron W. Shaw (2025)

⁴³ Thomas A. Code letter to Andrew Haydon, 1929.

⁴⁴ By Robert Lillie (1843-1929).