

## Exploring Lakeshore Today

(By Toshio U.-P.)

After spending time learning about the history of the Queen St. site with the Redevelopment Project still on-going at the present time of 2024, my research eventually led me to explore an old 'branch hospital' of the downtown Toronto site, further west in the small town of Mimico-by-the-lake, which later had its own catchment area for patients residing in the more westerly parts of Toronto and its boroughs. While Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital (LPH) permanently shut its doors in 1979 when an earlier site redevelopment at Queen St. West added a set of four 5-storey concrete Treatment Units to house different psychiatric castes of mental patients, I took an interest in the terminal years that 'Lakeshore' would operate as a mental health institution, primarily because it is easier to draw a link from the hospital grounds of this later period to the Humber College Lakeshore Campus as it exists today.

When touring the Humber College grounds in Mimico, one is bound to notice the red brick buildings dating back to the 1890s that were first conceived to give the tract of land a cottage and even pastoral feel. While these buildings currently represent educational space, serving as classrooms, labs, lecture halls and such, their previous functionality was largely carceral, with a set of 'cottages' to house male and female patients as well as a central Administration Building built in the Romanesque style to serve the hospital staff in charge of patient supervision and care, such as the doctors, nurses and administrators. When exploring the underground tunnel-scape that still connects many of the brick buildings of today, one will notice parts of the passages still have an "attractive barrel vaulted ceiling" (1) which patients and staff of the past would have noticed overhead when travelling below ground especially during the winter-time to commute to other parts in the network of cottages or to access the service building and cafeteria. An Assembly Hall—still used today as a gathering point and important hub on the campus—was added later in the 1890s for "social and utilitarian purposes" (2), serving as a space "for exercise, plays and other amusement as well as a chapel and a work area" (3).

Constructed in 1895 by "institutional labour" (3), Cumberland House was built just a short stroll away from the Administration Building, to initially serve as the home of the Medical Superintendent. While the norms of asylums of the earlier parts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century would have placed the most powerful health practitioner on-site in a "central pavilion" to "presid[e] over the establishment", the "cottage system" (3) originally in place at the Lakeshore grounds—known at the time as Mimico Asylum for the Insane—separated the home from the workplace, while still giving the residence a certain stature and distinction in the sophisticated and popular Queen Anne architectural style of the period. When Cumberland House eventually ceased to be a residential property, renovations were made to convert it to other purposes such as "a day and night care centre" and "a school for patients" (3). When touring the grounds of today, one can still behold remnants of the lovely lattice-work and hand-carved carved trim of the

“gingerbread” style (3) which hints at and displays the subtle grandeur and upscale lifestyle of the site’s presiding administrator who would have lived and raised a family in the large towered residential structure with its large curved veranda.

Looking back at the Queen St. site, which once was enclosed by a high brick wall along all of its boundaries, I wondered what the North boundary along Lakeshore Ave. looked like prior to the acreage being converted to educational and park space. Although I was unable to find archival photos of a fenced and gated North boundary in provincial archives, I was particularly drawn to a remaining structure on the northeast boundary called Gate House. Built in 1893 with patient labour, the small and stout two-storey red brick “entrance lodge” (3), was stationed as an entry point to the hospital zone through a preserved red-brick gate composed of two brick pillars in the popular style of its day. While another larger gate was once present at the southern foot of Kipling Ave.—to serve as a central access point to the insular grounds of Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital—only a short cottage-style fence once circumvented the rectilinear grounds of the hospital back in the late 1970s. Patient accounts from the last years of the hospital’s existence mention that it was fairly easy to hop over, or go through the fence to get to a bar or restaurant nearby. However, those without such privileges would be at serious risk of being brought back to Lakeshore by law enforcement and put into inpatient confinement.

Upon a first visit at the Humber College’s Lakeshore campus, one is inclined to find the space with its preserved heritage buildings idyllic, compared to a long list of other spaces where much or all of the original architecture has been removed to make way for a clean-slated modernity. With Lakeshore being the first hospital in Ontario built in the cottage system (3), it is a positive that curious visitors and urban historians can still make connections, through the extant architecture of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, to its institutional past. While most find the remaining buildings quite visually appealing, one must not only credit architects such as Kivas Tully for the work, but also must acknowledge the patient builders and labourers who ardently toiled with low or no wages to build many of the structures, much like the patient built wall that still stands in peripheral sections of CAMH’s Queen St. site in downtown Toronto. While mental health institutions are spatially revised, completely rebuilt or even shut down permanently, it is important to look beyond the advertised reality, viewing the architecture of the past and preserved heritage in such a manner to uncover the real stories and narratives of those deemed to be less ‘mentally fit’ and worthy of institutional confinement and incarceration. When we are in touch with such a concealed patient past and history, we begin to understand that old carceral institutions such as Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital represent a flawed health care system consciously trying to hide its previous errors while refining its methods of rehabilitation and reintegration in ways to avoid future ethical criticism.

Sources:

1. Lakeshore Planning Study-Final Report :Future use Options for the L.P.H. Property. By Peter Barnard Associates in association with A.J. Diamond Planners Ltd. 1986.
2. Lakeshore Neighbourhood Planning & Design Report:Revised Concept Plan and Analysis of Area Wide Issues, Prepared by Baird/Sampson Architects + Hemson Consulting Ltd. 1992.
3. Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital. Etobicoke, Metro Toronto. N00406 (report), Ontario Heritage Properties Program. 1986. p.10,11,13.



LAKESHORE PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL  
BOROUGH OF ETOBICOKE  
MAY 1978