Sir Adam Beck and His London Connections

Arthur McClelland

Introduction

Sir Adam Beck was popularly known as the Father of Hydro in Ontario, having brought the benefit of cheap electric light and power to the citizens of Ontario through a publicly owned utility, the Hydro-Electric Power Commission of Ontario. This article will focus on the various other activities and interests of Sir Adam Beck.

Family and Early Business Life

Beck came from an enterprising immigrant family of builders and makers. In 1829 Frederick and Barbara Beck emigrated to upstate New York from the Grand Duchy of Baden before it became part of the German Empire and then moved to Doon in Upper Canada, where they settled on a farm and built a sawmill. Their son Jacob Frederick, who had stayed behind to work first as a doctor's apprentice and later in the mills and locomotive works of Schenectady, joined them in 1837. He settled a few miles from his parents in Preston (now Cambridge) where he opened a foundry. When fire destroyed it, his friends rallied and he was able to rebuild an even bigger foundry. Jacob's first wife, Caroline Logus, whom he married in January 1843, died soon after the birth of a son, Charles.

In 1843 Beck recruited a skilled iron moulder from Buffalo, John Klarr, to join him. With Clare and another partner, Valentine Wahn, running the business, Beck returned to tour his homeland, where he met Charlotte Josephine Hespeler, the sister of his Preston neighbour, Jacob Hespeler who founded the town of Hespeler. When Charlotte came out to Canada, she and Beck were wed, in October 1845 and a daughter, Louisa, was born in 1847, followed by two sons, George and William. Jacob suggested relocating his company closer to the projected line of the Grand Trunk Railway, but Klarr refused. So in 1854 Beck dissolved the partnership and bought 190 acres on the route of the railway ten miles west of Berlin (now Kitchener). There he laid out a town-site, which he named Baden, and built a foundry, a grist mill, and a large brick house. Beck's businesses flourished on the strength of iron orders from the railway, and a brickyard and machine shop were eventually added.

It was in this thriving hamlet that Adam Beck was born on June 20, 1857. Adam's family spoke German at home and he learned English at school. Adam's early education was at the Baden Public School and Galt Grammar School. From 1872 to 1876, he attended Dr. William Tassie's boarding school in Galt (now Cambridge) but he preferred riding to reading. His formal education

ended at Rockwood Academy, near Guelph. On his return to Baden, Adam's father set him to work as a groundhog (a moulder's apprentice) in the foundry. Adam's career as a moulder came to an end with the failure of his father's businesses in 1879.

At age 63 Jacob Beck, started a new business, this time as a grain merchant in Detroit. The youngest members of the family including Adam accompanied their parents while William, one of the older boys, stayed in Baden to run the cigar-box manufactory he had started in 1878. Adam returned to work briefly in Toronto as a clerk in the Morrison Brass Works and then as an employee in a cigar factory.

VENEER THINLUMBER MILLS BOX WORKS LONDON & MONTREAL LONDON & MONTREAL

The Beck Manufacturing Company

ADAM BECK'S VENEER AND THIN LUMBER SAWMILLS
AND BOX WORKS.

With \$500 in borrowed money, he joined William and their cousin William Hespeler in a cigar-box factory in Galt in 1881. Hespeler eventually left the partnership, but the two Becks persisted and built a modestly successful business. In 1884, with the inducement of a five-year tax exemption and free water, they moved their works to London to be closer to the centre of the province's cigar-making industry. The company was called William Beck and Company. Adam stayed with

his aunt and uncle, Col. John Walker and his wife, the former Laura Hespeler, at 280 Queens Avenue. William left soon afterwards to open a branch in Montreal and for a time Adam worked in partnership with his brother George.

From January 1, 1888 Adam was the sole proprietor of William Beck and Company which became the Beck Manufacturing Company Limited in 1892. The company eventually had branches in Hamilton and Toronto. Beck set up a bedroom in his factory so that he could rise early and get started on the day's activities at dawn. He sharpened the saws himself before the working day began and often delivered orders, pushing a two-wheeled handcart through the streets. Then he sat up at night doing the accounts.

Earlier in the 19th century cigars consumed in Canada had originated in Germany and later they came from the United States. The imposition of a tariff of 25 % on rolled cigars, but not on tobacco leaf, led to the migration of the industry to Canada. London was one of the first major centres where the leaf grown in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin entered Canada and it was there and in Montreal that the cigar-making business took root. In London the industry would reach its peak around 1912, when 22 companies, employing almost 2,000 workers, produced more than 20 million cigars. Situated at 161-175 Albert Street, the Beck factory was essentially a veneer plant. Cedar logs and specialty woods from Mexico and Spain arrived by rail, were stored in the yard for seasoning, and then were peeled into strips to make not only cigar boxes but also cheese boxes and veneer for furniture, hosiery boards and pianos. All other timber, mostly basswood and soft elm, was obtained locally. Redwood was imported from the southern United States for special veneers. Working side by side with his employees (25 in 1889, rising to 125 in 1919), Beck built a thriving business, taking orders, setting up equipment, manhandling logs, and wheeling the finished boxes to customers. Beck himself was a non-smoker. Eventually the company supplied all of the main cigar makers with as many as 5,000 boxes a day. These boxes were manufactured according to special orders due to the variety of the lengths and sizes of cigars made by the 20 London firms. Until he was 40, business was Adam Beck's main preoccupation. In 1897, he turned his business over to his brother, Jacob. After Beck's death in 1925, the company was taken over by William Kingston and renamed William Kingston Limited until 1931.

Beck's Sportsmanship

An avid sportsman, he had played baseball as a boy. In London he played lacrosse and tennis and, with a group of bachelors, organized a toboggan club. In 1883, Adam and a young banker had carried off the tennis doubles championship of Western Canada. In 1884, on the advice of his doctor he took up riding again for relaxation and quickly became a breeder of racehorses and a competitive jumper. His first champion horse was called Roseberry. While riding, Beck was always correctly dressed in boots and breeches. His social life revolved around the London Hunt Club where, in 1897, he became master of the hounds, a post he would hold until 1922. Beck formed

rifle clubs and donated trophies for the encouragement of the amateur sport. The Beck stables produced a string of outstanding hunter-class horses that won Adam and Lillian international recognition. In 1907 they competed in the Olympia Horse Show in London, England, where Lillian's horse, My Fellow, won its class.

In 1911, Beck was elected director of the National Horse Show Association of America as well as of the International Horse Show, London. To remain competitive, the Becks leased an estate in England in 1913 to maintain their equestrian operation at the highest international standards. From that time onward Lillian and Marion lived about half the year in England. In 1914 their prizewinning horses Melrose, Sir Edward, and Sir James were counted among the finest middleweight and heavyweight hunters in the world. The Becks also competed regularly at the National Horse Show in New York City where, in 1915, Lillian was named a judge over chauvinist protests, famously breaking down the barriers of this once exclusively male domain.

Married Life with Lady Beck

As one of London's leading eligible bachelors, Beck belonged to an organization of young men who put on a popular Bachelors' Ball every year. He had always lived in bachelor apartments but he tended to annoy his friends with his mania for tidiness. A mutual love of horses and riding brought the muscular Beck and the slim, strikingly beautiful Lillian Ottaway together at a jumping meet; she was 23 years his junior. After a whirlwind courtship they were married on September 7, 1898 at Christ's Church Anglican Cathedral in Hamilton. Lillian, who had been raised in Britain,



spoke with a slight English accent, had a lovely soprano voice, rode with gusto, and carried herself regally.

Lillian Ottaway was born in London, England, the only child of Marion Stinson and John Cuthbert Ottoway, a barrister of the Inner Temple, London, England. Lillian's father was a celebrated cricketer and a member of the first English eleven to make a tour of Canada. Lillian was educated in Brussels, Belgium. After his marriage, Adam did not attend the Lutheran church but joined his wife as a member of St. Paul's Cathedral where she frequently sang solos. Lillian was also a member of the Women's Musical Club. Lady Beck was instrumental in the day to day operation of the sanatorium as President of the Women's Sanatorium Aid Society. Lady Beck personally supervised the ordering of all the furnishings of the patient bedrooms and common areas, linens and all the kitchen food preparation equipment and table service. Lady Beck helped sew the linen for the

sanatorium. She also ordered all the medical equipment including complete operating rooms, laboratory equipment, equipment to sterilize medical instruments and a full dental suite. As president, Lady Beck also organized a variety of private and public fundraising functions including balls, ice cream socials, rummage sales, tag days and whist drives. Lady Beck was also president of the Women's Auxiliary of the London Health Board and President of the London Red Cross society which pledged to raise money to furnish rooms. Lady Beck often gave concerts for the patients.

In September 1914, the London Red Cross was revived with Lady Beck as president. In 1914, the London Local Council of Women was reorganized with Lady Beck as its president. On October 17, 1921, Lady Beck died at the age of 43 from complications following surgery for pancreatitis at the Toronto General Hospital. On November 10, 1924, Premier Howard Ferguson unveiled a tablet to Lady Beck at the Sanatorium. Lady Beck was also president of the Ladies' Auxiliary of the London Health Board and a member of the board of the Queen Alexandria Sanitarium.

His Public Life in Municipal Affairs



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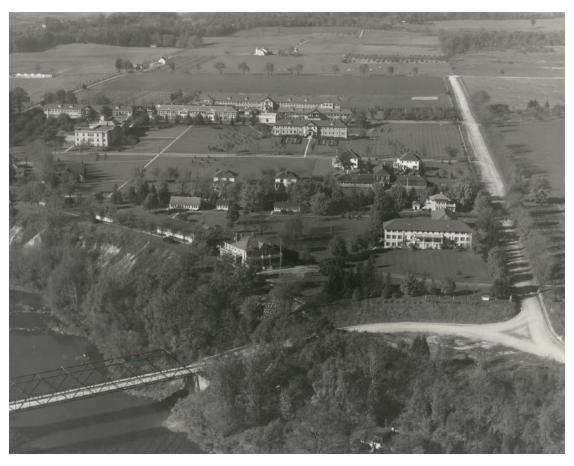
Adam Beck soon developed an interest in public life. Beck entered the general election of March 1898 as a Conservative candidate and fell 301 votes short of beating the Liberal candidate, Col. Francis Baxter Leys. In September 1902, Beck attended the first meeting of the newly organized Union of Canadian Municipalities held at Montreal.

From 1902 to 1905, he was mayor of London. He promoted civic beautification by offering a prize from his own purse for a garden competition. He persuaded the city to take over the operation of the London and Port Stanley Railway when the private operator's lease expired. He cleaned out the fire department, promoted public health and became involved in the leadership of the Union of Canadian Municipalities, whose annual convention he brought to London in 1904 as president of that union.

Personally, Beck maintained an active interest in civic politics. When the water commissioners proposed a treatment facility to take more water from the tainted Thames River, he promised to find enough clean fresh water in artesian wells. The city took him up on this offer, voting \$10,000 for the purpose. In 1910 Beck drilled the wells, installed electrical pumps, and brought the project in on time and on budget of \$100,000 or rather, he absorbed the excess costs of \$6,000 himself. On November 25, 1913, the citizens of London held a banquet at the Mason Temple, then located at Queens Avenue, to honour Adam Beck and his wife for their services to the community. After a sumptuous meal, Adam Beck and his wife were presented with a beautiful candelabra and a silver tray.

Adam Beck was also elected vice-president and director of the London Rolling Mills Ltd, and was appointed chairman of the London and Port Stanley Railway Commission. The tenth London Old Boys Reunion was held from August 4-11, 1923 and Sir Adam Beck was one of the honorary presidents. Beck was also a member of the Victoria Hospital Board, Masonic Order A.F. & A.M, the St. James Club of Montreal, the Albany of Toronto and the London Club.





However, it was in the field of public health that the Becks made their greatest contribution. At the turn of the 20th century, tuberculosis, a disease of the respiratory system, was the leading cause of death in Ontario and Canada with 2,000 persons from Ontario alone dying annually. Tuberculosis was also known as consumption, phthisis and the "white plague." On the average, one Canadian died from TB every hour during the day and one every half hour at night. London had the fourth highest death rate in Ontario after Toronto, Hamilton and Ottawa. Beck's father-in-law had died from TB before Lillian was born. After the death of her first husband, Lillian's mother was married to Peter Duncan Crerar, a prominent Hamilton lawyer. In 1906, they helped establish the Mountain View Sanatorium in Hamilton.

In 1910, the Becks' six-year-old daughter, Marion Auria, contracted tuberculosis. Her worried parents sought out the best specialists in America and in Europe. After a long and anxious struggle, Marion recovered fully but the Becks became concerned for those families in their community who lacked the means to provide their children with medical care. Everyone, they believed, ought to have close access to first-class tuberculosis facilities. The idea of building a facility for the

care and treatment of TB patients in London had first been suggested in 1900. In 1905, a London branch of one of the associations for the prevention of tuberculosis was formed to provide the public with information on the treatment and prevention of TB. Victoria Hospital discussed the establishment of a special seven-bed ward but unfortunately this idea was never acted upon.

In 1908, there were 54 deaths in London from consumption and over 60 cases in 1909. There was great controversy in London as to what approach should be taken in the fight against TB. Should TB be addressed by the local general hospital or should there be a separate hospital for TB patients and, if it was a separate hospital, should it be privately or publicly operated. In 1908, Beck called a meeting of all parties involved including the various levels of government. At this meeting, the provincial health officials proposed the establishment of a privately operated sanatorium. As a result, on January 12, 1909 Adam and Lillian Beck organized the London Health Association to construct and provide a sanatorium for tuberculosis patients. The first officers were Beck as president, John B. Smallman as vice-president and Herbert E. Gates as the secretary-treasurer. The 163-acre Charles Lawson and Weir farms at Lots 27 and 28, Concession 1 London Township were purchased for \$6,700 as a site for the sanatorium near the village of Byron.

From local individuals and organizations they raised \$10,000 (led by their own donation of \$1,200), the city contributed \$5,000, and the province added \$4,000. Beck had planned to place the original building only 70 feet back from Sanatorium Road but the local London Township farmers wanted the building to be 150 feet back from the road so their children would not risk getting infected by the sanatorium's patients. A compromise was reached and the building was built 120 feet back from the road. William G. Murray was the appointed architect and John Purdon, the builder of the new Sanatorium.

On April 5, 1910 Governor General Lord Grey officially opened the 42-bed Queen Alexandra Sanatorium. The sanatorium was named after Queen Alexandra, wife of King Edward VII. The first patients arrived on August 8 at "The San", as it was called. The Sanatorium building was electrified on December 1, 1910. Adam Beck was the president of the Canadian Association for the Prevention of Tuberculosis. For the rest of their lives, the Becks remained deeply attached to this sanatorium and made its maintenance and expansion their passion. Beck insisted on having the latest laboratory facilities and medical equipment available. Lady Beck personally oversaw several fundraising projects including the Christmas Seal Campaign of 1913 and the successful "rose days" in which thousands of roses were sold. The first Rose Day in 1914 raised \$2,900. Learning one Sunday that the furnace was not working, Beck went to the sanatorium, examined the furnace, located the source of the trouble and taking off his coat, made the necessary repairs.

Beck was elected the president of the Canadian Association for the Prevention of Tuberculosis in 1912. Beck was also president from its inception of the London Health Association to his death in 1925. In the early days, Major, one of Adam Beck's horses, pulled a light wagon driven by Fred Richardson and went to the city every morning to pick up the mail and supplies. Major

was also used to take patients to and from the street car which ran from London to the terminal in Springbank Park.

On June 4, 1914, Lt. Gov. Sir John Gibson opened the children's preventorium with accommodation for 26 children at a cost of \$32,383. In 1917, there was a public appeal for donations for the Sanatorium. Funds were needed for new buildings and more equipment to accommodate soldiers returning to Canada with tuberculosis. A pamphlet containing information about the sanatorium's needs was produced in 1917 called "How Big is Your Heart?" Sir Adam Beck donated \$50,263 to the campaign. The Queen Alexandra Sanatorium in Ontario was expanded in 1917-18 to accommodate the rehabilitation of wounded returnees. On January 21, 1918, the Duke of Devonshire officiated at the opening of the 95-bed reception hospital which cost \$200,000. At the time of Lady Beck's death in 1921, the sanatorium had 300 beds and 255 acres. The sanatorium also had an apiary, a herd of 93 purebred Holstein and Jersey cows and a hennery of over 1,000 fowl. By 1925, the San had purchased five neighbouring farms, bringing the acreage up to 353. Beck's death bed appeal to the people of Ontario brought a subscription of \$425,000 as the Beck Memorial Endowment.

On November 1, 1928, Governor-General Lord Willingdon officially opened the 80-bed Pocock Pavilion. The Queen Alexandria Sanatorium was renamed the Beck Memorial Sanatorium on April 6, 1949. On May 9, 1970, the Beck Memorial Sanatorium changed its name to the Sir Adam Beck Chest Diseases Unit which closed on September 6, 1972 and moved to the sixth floor of University Hospital where it was officially opened on April 11, 1973. On February 1, 1960, the Children's Psychiatric Research Institute (CPRI) opened in the former 82-bed Pratten Building built in 1938. CPRI changed its name to the Child and Parent Resource Institute in 1992. The only building left standing on the original sanatorium grounds is the chapel.

The Becks and the War Effort

In 1912, Beck became a colonel in the Canadian militia and at the outset of the war he served as the Director of Remounts, taking charge of acquiring horses for the Canadian army in the territory from Halifax to the Lakehead. In June, 1915 he assumed this responsibility for the British army as well, an appointment that brought him an honorary colonelcy. Adam and Lillian Beck donated all of their champion horses to the cause. General Edwin Alfred Hervey Alderson, for example, rode Sir James, Adam's most famous horse. Lady Beck, in England for most of the war, working with the Canadian Red Cross Society, devoted herself particularly to ensuring that wounded veterans were welcomed into British country homes for their convalescence. In 1916, for his local and patriotic help, Beck had received an LLD from the Western University, for which he served as a director and later as chancellor.

Beck's Death and Memory

Beck's health deteriorated. Ordered to rest by his doctors, who had diagnosed his illness as pernicious anaemia, Beck went to South Carolina for a holiday in February, and then he underwent transfusion treatment at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. In May, Beck quietly slipped back to his home in London. He weakened rapidly over the summer, sank into a coma on August 12 and died on August 15, 1925 at Headley in his 69th year. A grandfather clock located on the landing of Headley's main stairway stopped an hour before Adam Beck died.

Ontario city halls were draped in black and, in London, business ceased for an hour. Thousands lined the streets eight and ten deep for his funeral cortège. The ceremony at St Paul's Anglican Cathedral on August 17, attended by all the major political figures of the province, was also broadcast over the radio. This was the first non-studio location radio broadcast in London. Arthur S. Blackburn founded London's first radio station, CJGC in the London Free Press Building on Richmond Street. Sir Adam Beck officially dedicated the station on September 30, 1922. It was the second station to be licensed in Canada. The station was sold to Essex Broadcasters Limited in 1933.

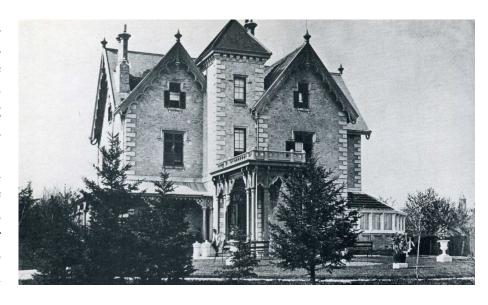
Beck was buried in Greenwood Cemetery beside his wife. The entire Toronto City Council attended his burial. He died a wealthy man with an estate valued at \$627,976. After making numerous small bequests to relatives and charities, he left a trust fund of approximately half a million dollars to his daughter and her heirs.

Beck's memory was kept alive by the citizens of London. On May 13, 1926, Premier Howard Ferguson unveiled a plaque at the Sanatorium in memory of Sir Adam Beck. The Women's Sanatorium Aid Society of London built a chapel, St Luke's in the Garden, across from the Queen Alexandra Sanatorium in memory of the Becks which was dedicated on November 10, 1932. The cost of the chapel was \$11,995. The two stained glass windows in the chancel were the gift of Mrs. Strathern Hay of Toronto, in tribute to her parents, Sir Adam and Lady Lillian Beck. Mrs. Hay turned the key in the door to open the chapel. The windows were designed and manufactured by the Robert McCausland Company of Toronto.

Headley

After a honeymoon tour of Europe, Beck brought his bride to London where in 1902 they purchased Elliston, the estate of Ellis Walton Hyman at 790 Richmond Street which they remodeled with his and hers stables, under a new name, Headley after his wife's parents' home in Surrey, England. Ellis Walton Hyman was a leather manufacturer and tanner and father of the Hon. Charles Hyman, Minister of Public Works in the Laurier government. Hyman built Elliston in 1862. Just before the Becks purchased Elliston, a carriage entrance and tower had been added to the home in 1899.

They hired a butler, a two gardeners, cook. housekeeper and three maids to run the estate. Its extensive grounds, covering a whole city block bounded by Richmond, St. James, Sydenham and Wellington streets, gave them ample room for exercising and stabling their horses. Their home, a mansion with 16 rooms, became the social centre for London society.



Winston Churchill stayed with them on his lecture tour of 1900-1 as did Governor General Lord Minto and Lady Minto in 1903. In 1942, the former horse stables were converted into seven apartments known as the Headley Apartments. In October 1957, a provincial plaque was unveiled commemorating Headley. It has since disappeared.

Col. Gordon Thompson was a longtime owner of Headley. After he died, the estate was divided and the house was sold to Sifton Properties. On June 19, 1986, Sifton Properties unveiled its model for an \$11 million 67-unit luxury condominium development on the site of Headley to be called Sir Adam Beck Manor. Despite assurances it would not be demolished, Headley was demolished in the autumn of 1987 and replaced in 1990 by a replica built with modern materials.

Ottoway Avenue

At the May 15, 1905 London City Council meeting, a petition was brought forward to have the name of South Street changed to Ottoway Avenue in honour of Lady Lillian (nee Ottoway) Beck, who was a dedicated volunteer for Victoria Hospital which was located on South Street. Council gave its approval but County Judge Talbot Macbeth turned down the city's application. At the July 7, 1913 London City Council meeting, the No. 2 Committee again suggested that South Street be changed to Ottoway Avenue. On November 14, 1914, the Board of Control asked for the change to be removed from the proposed by-law.

Ottoway Avenue became the popular name for South Street with city directories, beginning in 1908 referring to the street as Ottoway Avenue. The London Street Railway operated an Ottoway Avenue streetcar. In 1947, City Clerk Reg Cooper insisted that South Street was not Ottoway Avenue and then city engineer Roy Garrett posted South Street signs on the former Ottoway Avenue.

Sir Adam Beck Collegiate Institute

The predecessor to the Sir Adam Beck Collegiate Institute was the East End Collegiate Institute which opened on September 4, 1923 at the old Princess Avenue School. This is now the site of the Jarvis Apartments. One site suggested for the new collegiate institute had been Beck's home, Headley. Just a month before his death, Sir Adam Beck negotiated the purchase of 21½ acres of the Asylum property on July 1, 1925 for school purposes at the cost of \$25,000. On November 17, 1925, Fred Lawrason, chairman of the London Board of Education turned the first sod for the new collegiate. On February 22, 1927, Lt. Gov. William Donald Ross formally opened Sir Adam Beck Collegiate Institute. The school closed in June 1982. On April 30, 1985, the London Board of Education's new education centre opened in the former Sir Adam Beck Secondary School. It was converted at a cost of \$7.6 million. It is now the administrative centre for the Thames Valley District School Board.

Marion Auria Beck



Marion was born on January 21, 1904 in London. She first married John Strathearn Hay (1897-1973) of Toronto, son of John Hay and Elizabeth Hendrie, on January 25, 1925. John and Marion had one daughter, Lillian. Marion was married a second time on June 26, 1935 to John P. Holland of England. She died of uraemia on March 21, 1944 in the Toronto General Hospital at the age of 40. Marion was one of the outstanding horsewomen in North America. She was also an outstanding golfer, a crack shot and an international expert on Corgi dog breeding.

Marion Beck Nurses' Residence

The Marion Beck Nurses' Residence was built at a cost of \$30,000 and was dedicated by Sir William Hearst on July 10, 1918. Lady Beck did all of the decorating and ordering of furnishings for the Marion Beck Nurses' Residence. It was the gift of Sir Adam and Lady Beck "in gratitude to God for the complete restoration to health of our daughter." When Sir Adam, who was reading the opening address, became so choked with emotion that he could not continue, Lady Beck stepped forward and finished the speech. A wing was added in 1932. The residence was a two-storey frame building with brick veneer, a slate roof and a full basement. It had accommodation for 60 people.

Lady Beck Public School

On November 26, 1930, the Lady Beck Public School opened on the northwest corner of Dundas Street and Highbury Road. This school had its beginnings in a one-room school on Hale Street. Because of its proximity to Sir Adam Beck Collegiate Institute, it was decided to name the new school Lady Beck. The Lady Beck School closed in June 1979. The building is still standing today and is occupied by Academie de la Tamise, a French elementary school.

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