



Driving Tour of Amaranth Township

Amaranth...the Keystone Township of Dufferin

Starting Point: Welcome to Laurel and the Amaranth Municipal Building. Here you are right in the middle of things in Dufferin county. Amaranth is the centerpiece of the county – bordering on all the other municipalities in Dufferin (even corner to corner with Mulmur!)

Enjoy the tour!

STARTING POINT—AMARANTH MUNICIPAL OFFICES

Turn right, toward County Road 10 (10 Sideroad) and turn left towards the Village of Laurel.

Stop #1 Village of Laurel

Once known as the village of churches, Laurel had four congregations and three church buildings, and a population of about 80 souls. The last church closed this year: the United Church (north of the intersection) was built in 1888 as the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Bell's Presbyterian Church still stands south of Grand River Furniture, and south of that was the Anglican Church, bought by the township in 1872 for a township hall, and later owned by the Laurel Women's Institute. Grand River Furniture occupies the site of the former General Store and Post Office. Several of the houses in the village were built by the Hughes brothers, cousins of Jack Hughes, founder of the Hughes Corn Flower company. The village was given its name by Anne Spence, mother of teacher, storekeeper and first postmaster David Spence, supposedly to commemorate the laurel bush that grew in the yard of her old home in County Armagh, Ireland. When pioneer John Brown arrived at Laurel in 1847 to claim his land grant, he took one look at it, and sold it: most of his land was underwater, thanks to a huge beaver dam that flooded everything east of the Fifth Line.



Cheese Factory, Laurel, circa 1905

Turn right (south) on County Road 12 (Fifth Line) and head south.

Stop #2:

You pass productive farmland as you head south: some of the earlier settlers in the township took up this land in the 1840s, and their descendants remain in the township to this day. Of note, is the Lanktree farm on the east side of the road, still in the same family after 150 years.



Livestock on Menary's Farm, Laurel, 1961

At Five Sideroad, turn right (west) and proceed to the second intersection.

Stop #3 "Salem of Amaranth"



Students of Salem School, 1896

You pass through the old community of Salem or "Salem in Amaranth" to distinguish it from "Salem in Mono." You will see the former Salem schoolhouse, built in the 1920s, the third school house in the section. This part of the township was settled a bit later than the neighboring areas, due in part to the large swamp along the south edge of the township. Once the settlers figured out how to drain their fields, they turned into high producing farms, aided by a number of township drainage schemes in the 1880s. A school was built in 1872 and Salem Methodist Church organized about the same time, which gave the community its name. These early buildings were located at "McCullough's Jog", between the 6th and 7th lines. West of the jog, enjoy one of the great views of the big skies over Amaranth.

At the Seventh Line, turn left (south) and proceed to Dufferin Road 109.

Stop #4 Amaranth Station

Again you pass more productive farmland, and some new residential homes. About 1.5 kilometers south, the road rises over a knoll, and then a second rise reveals the old roadbed of the Toronto Grey and Bruce Railway. An open area to the left is the site of Amaranth Station, a flag stop similar to Crombie's Station at the Muse-

um of Dufferin, built in 1873 to serve the local area. This was the "Teeswater Branch" of the TG& B, running west from Fraxa Junction to Waldemar, Grand Valley, Arthur, and Mount Forest. Passenger service ran each way morning and evening, as well as freight service, making it easy for local farmers to ship their produce to Orangeville and Toronto markets. Amaranth Station was also a post office with rural routes serving Amaranth and East Garafraxa until the 1960s. CPR took over the line in 1884. Passenger service was maintained until about 1960, when mixed freights replaced the old service. The line was abandoned in the 1980s, the tracks taken up and the right of way sold.

Proceeding south, you may note the sharp rise of land behind the trees on the right side of the road. You may also note gravel extraction. This was the farm owned and occupied by Alexander McLachlan, the famed Canadian poet of the late 19th century. He wrote about the immigrant experience to Canada, and about the equality of people in general. Many of his poems were written in the Scots dialect, similar to that of Robbie Burns. He published six books of poetry to great acclaim during his lifetime. His portrait hangs in the Museum of Dufferin. In addition to his poetry, his good friend Thomas Darcy McGee appointed him Emigration Agent for Scotland, ensuring McLachlan an adequate income to support his family. His son Alexander was the farmer who worked these fields.



**Alexander McLachlan, 1887 and
the Mclachlan Farm ca. 1880**



At Dufferin Road 109, turn right, and proceed to the second intersection, the Ninth Line:

Stop #5 Black Swamp

As you turn the corner, the territory to the south (on your left) was known as the Black Swamp, hemmed in by moraines to the south, which are now a significant source of aggregate. The large red brick house on your right marks the site of the McLachlan farm buildings, although this house was built by a subsequent owner of the property. As you drive, you will see more aggregate extraction on your right.

At the Ninth Line, turn right, and proceed north to the first intersection, Station Street.

Stop #6

This road takes you through more farmland, improving as you head north, and gain a bit of elevation for improved drainage.

At Station Street, turn left (west), and proceed into the village of Waldemar, to the end of the road.

Stop #7 Waldemar Station

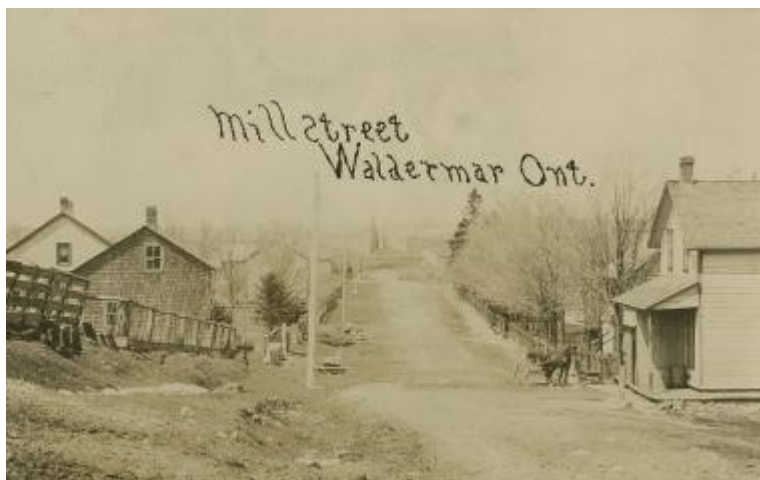


Moving Waldemar Station, 1960

To your right, obscured by cedar trees, is the valley of the Willow Brook, and the CPR rail bed. A number of houses line the road as you approach the village. It's difficult to see the site of Waldemar station now, but it lay behind some of the buildings on the north side of the road. The station made Waldemar. Amaranth township had been a keen supporter of the TG&B and was the only township to get both main line and branch line within its borders. Luther township to the west was not as keen, so the TG&B built a major station at Waldemar to handle passengers, freight, cattle and wood from western Amaranth and the Grand Valley area. And the village boomed.

At the intersection, the building ahead of you was one of the village hotels. The village itself stretches away to the south, along the Grand River, where grist and saw mills once flourished. Waldemar was also the site of Dufferin county's first museum. In the late 19th century, George Johnston kept a small museum of natural history exhibits, that can claim that distinction.

At the 10th line, turn right (north), and give yourself some time to look to your right.



Stop #8

The stone buttresses are all that remain of the trestle that once carried the railway over the Grand River. And just behind it, you can see where two significant streams add their flow to the Grand: on the left is the Willow Brook which drains a large portion of the township, and on the right is a stream that rises in Mud Lake in the midst of the Black Swamp and enters the Grand here. This corner used to be a popular spot for young paddlers. The bottom of the river is smooth stone here making wading and "getting wet" a simple pleasure.

Continue north and enjoy the views of the river as it bends on its way from Grand Valley to the west. At the next intersection (Five Sideroad), turn east (right), and proceed to the second intersection (Eighth Line).

This is one of the "rollier" parts of Amaranth, thanks to the Willow Brook on your left, and the valley it has carved over the eons. Again, fertile farmland abuts the road, thanks to the good drainage afforded by the river valley.

Turn north (left) on the Eighth Line.

At the Eighth Line, take note of the farm buildings to your right and on the east side of the road. This is the farm of Judie and Bruce Bryan, and the buildings you see were built in 1985, the barn raised with the help of Mennonite volunteer crews. The original buildings were destroyed in the tornado of May 31, 1985, that swept across Dufferin County, along this road, from Grand Valley through to Mono township.

Stop #10 Village of Bowling Green

Enjoy the scenery of the farmsteads, and to your left, the Willow Brook. At the next intersection, County Road 10 (10 Sideroad) stop briefly. To your right, up the hill, are the remnants of the old village of Bowling Green. It came into being about 1860, with the arrival of William (Kitley Bill) Jelly and a number of others from Leeds county in eastern Ontario. It developed into a rural service centre, with a school, two churches, blacksmith, and in the early 1900s, a telephone exchange. Bob Edgar was one of the pioneers of rural telephone service in Dufferin county. While the exchange was set up in Laurel, Bob lived and worked out of Bowling Green. By the time he died in 1938, he owned most of the old buildings and lots in the village, but he owed quite a bit of money, most significantly to his "operator" in Laurel. Most the village was sold at public auction to pay the operator's back wages.

The famous Dufferin mastadon bones were found east and south of the village on a farm owned by William Jelly.



Photo of John Jelly with mastadon bones, 1891

Turn left (west) on County Road 10, proceed to the next intersection:

Stop #11 Mitchell Methodist Church



As you cross the bridge over Willow Creek, the cemetery on the left marks the site of Mitchell Methodist Church. Many of the pioneers of this part of Amaranth are interred here. Immediately to the north of the cemetery, across the road, was the Anglican Church. At the top of the hill, on your left, was the Menary farm. The famous picture of the young ladies playing croquet was taken on the lawn here.

At the Ninth Line, turn right, and proceed to the next intersection.

Stop #12 Jack Hughes & Corn Flower



Corn Flower—depression glass cake plate, 1937

As you move away from the Willow Brook the character of the land changes, flattening out again into the familiar contours of the Dundalk Till Plain. The second set of buildings on your left, on Lot 12, is the birthplace of Jack Hughes, the creator of Corn Flower Glass. He and his twin brother Bob were born in 1881, just a few days after the census taker had called to collect the family details. Much of this part of the township was still in the "pioneer" period at that date, with log buildings and partially cleared property.

At 15 Sideroad, turn left and proceed to the next intersection.

Stop #13 Huckleberry Marsh

At the intersection, the Ninth Line disappears. Ahead and to the northeast are the remnants of the famous Huckleberry Marsh that once supplied blueberries to all who would take the time to pick them.

At 10th Line, turn right, and proceed north to the second intersection, 25 Sideroad.

Stop #14 Campania

On the corner, is the building formerly Reid's School, SS 8, Amaranth. The first school was built here in 1871 on the Reid farm, and the name stuck. Heading north, you pass more farmland, coming to the community of Campania at 20 Sideroad. The name was inspired by "The Last Days of Pompeii." All that remains is the Methodist Church building on the corner, built in 1902. It became part of the United Church of Canada in 1925, and closed in 1960. After the former Orange Hall across the corner burned down, the Campania W.I. bought the old church and used it as a community hall.

Continuing north on the 10th line, you eventually reach the landmark hill. The farm on the hill was settled by the Burnside family in 1874, and part of the original log house survives in the current farm home. There were no roads in this part of Amaranth then, and it took Thomas Burnside and his bride Eliza Jane Davis three days to move a stove from her old home at Campania to their homestead on the hill. From the hill, you also get a great a view of the wind farm to the north and east.

At 25 Sideroad, turn right. Proceed to the third intersection, the Seventh Line.

Stop #15 Sylvandell

At the intersection was SS 18, Amaranth, known as Sylvandell, to the north was Maple Grove, and at the 9th line corner was Fernbank school, all coming into existence after 1883. On the northwest corner of 25 Sideroad and the 7th line, stands the school known as Amaranth College. Although a smaller school section, it had an inordinate amount of scholarship and prize winners in its early years, and hence earned its academic sounding name.

Turn right (south) on the Seventh Line and proceed to the next intersection.



SS#18 Amaranth (Sylvandell) ca. 1970. It was closed 1964 and later became a private residence.

Stop #16 Willowbrook Farm

As you head south, the character of the land again begins to change. Just south of the corner, is a large sod farm, one of the alternative forms of winning a living from the land, and further south, on your left is Willowbrook Farm. At the intersection with 20 Sideroad, we come back to Willow Brook.

Turn left on 20 Sideroad and proceed east toward the third intersection, the Sixth Line.

Stop #17 Black's Corners

As we head east on the paved county road, we pass, on your right hand side, three large, nearly identical red brick farm houses. These were the Ritchie farms, two brothers and a cousin, who knew how to successfully farm the Amaranth land.

At the 6th line, is the community of Black's Corners, with only the school house remaining. There was a Presbyterian Church here from the 1860s, one of the oldest in the township. Now little remains.

After you stop at County Road 12, watch on your left for an air strip, one of several privately owned ones in the township.



A tinted black & white photograph of the Ritchie farm.

Continue east towards 4th Line. At the intersection, turn north on the 4th line, and proceed to the second intersection, 30 Sideroad.

Stop #18 Coleridge

The first farm on your right (the buildings actually face the Sideroad), was the home of the Rintoul family, and the site where Mr. Rintoul wrote his series of letters about pioneer life in Dufferin county to his brother David in Scotland during the 1860s. Despite all he had read, David and his family emigrated to Amaranth in the early 1880s. As you head north, the better quality farmland of north eastern Amaranth becomes apparent. This is part of the Coleridge community, and was settled relatively early compared to other parts of the township, particularly to the west. The prosperous farmers of this area helped win Amaranth prominence at local show fairs, and in many county agricultural pursuits.



Louise (Curtis) Rintoul and friend in buggy, ca. 1909

At 30 Sideroad, turn right and proceed to the next intersection.

Stop #19 Beslea Farm

The farm on your right, was the Besley homestead from 1874, and as you proceed, the farm on your left is Beslea farm, now technically in the Town of Shelburne, but the site of a good farm gate market.

At County Road 11 (aka 3rd Line or Victoria Street), turn right and proceed to 25 Sideroad

Stop #20 "Hotel Country"



Coleridge School, 1968

The paved road that now whisks you south is part of the old stage coach route from Shelburne to Orangeville. It was called the Victoria Road, and the top end of it is still known as Victoria Street in Shelburne. As you head south over the hill, you come to some of the famous dairy farms of Amaranth. In early days, this was "hotel" country, with Joseph Trueman's famous Mount Nebo Inn, and George Stone's Coleridge Hotel on either side of the road, an important and early stop for stagecoach travelers. Coleridge schoolhouse was just to the south.

At 25 Sideroad, turn left and proceed to the next intersection, Second Line.

Stop #22

This is the again on the old stage coach route, which headed east til it reached Camilla on Highway 10. More farmland , and township pioneers: Timbles to the north, Johnstons to the south. At the intersection, the large building of the Collins produce company is home to major spinach growing operation.

At Second Line turn right, and proceed south to the second intersection (15 sideroad).

Stop #21 Whittington

Up and over the hill, the landscape opens out in front of you, and as you cross the creek, notice the signage for the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority, a reminder that the main branch of the Nottawasaga river actually rises in Amaranth. A little further south, mature maple trees line the road, the Cruickshank farm on the right with its large red brick house. Across the road was the farm of David Spence, whose collection of household antiques and farm equipment formed the nucleus of the Dufferin County Historical Society collection, and hence the MoD's collection.

At the first intersection, 20 Sideroad, on the right was Kennedy's Tavern, which for a time led this to be called Kennedy's Corner, and here we again pick up the Victoria Road stage coach route. More familiarly, this area was called Rich Hill. The Orange Hall in the MoD stood on the south east corner here, where a new home now occupies its site. It was the corner of the Spence farm, where the buildings sit on top of Rich Hill, on the east side of the road. This too was the home of Anne Spence Hamilton, who wrote and had published, a considerable amount of poetry in the 1920s to 1940s.

Heading south, through more varied farmland, we reach the village of Whittington. The rather tatterdemalion buildings on your right, are what is left of the Anglican Establishment in Amaranth. One building was home to the missionary, and the other building is the remains of an Anglican church. Whittington was home base for the Whittington Rifle Company, and large drill shed stood here. At the corner, the church shed survives, although Whittington Methodist Church is long gone, demolished in the late 1960s. The former Whittington schoolhouse stands to the west.



Play actors at the United Church



View of Whittington taken from Staveley's windmill, 1912

At the stop sign at 15 sideroad, turn left and head east to the first intersection:

At the intersection with County Road 16 / Mono-Amaranth Townline, turn right, and proceed to the next intersection.

Stop #23 Mono-Amaranth Townline

You are travelling south on the Mono-Amaranth town line: Mono on your left, Amaranth on your right. This is also the old district and county line that once divided Wellington on your right from Simcoe on your left – a real point of demarcation. At 10 Sideroad, we cross another branch of the Nottawasaga River running out of Amaranth feeding the main branch of the large river. The farms at the intersection were cleared and settled by members of the Dale family in the early 1840s. Heading south we continue into the earliest settled part of the township.

At the intersection with 10 sideroad, turn right (west).

You are entering Amaranth from Mono and climbing up hill to do it. On your right was Alexander Hughson's farm, one of the sons of the first family to settle in Amaranth. Slow down on top of the hill and enjoy the views – in all directions. Pull over a few minutes to appreciate the rolling rural scenery.

Stop #24 Farmington—the Township Capital



Sam Merrit, Manager of the Farmington Hotel (2nd from left)

This is the community of Farmington, the first capital of Amaranth. The first council meetings were held here in the old school house. The second school house lies ahead at the foot of the hill, and is now a private residence. On the northwest corner, was Wallace's Hotel, and a dance hall land meeting hall. On the south east corner, was Curry's blacksmith and wagon shop, and John Curry's hotel. There was a furniture maker for a time just south of the corner. The white cottage at the corner was traditionally the home of the Farmington blacksmith.

The Curry brothers did a roaring trade during the American Civil War selling wagons to Union and Confederate alike, but they took a hit at the end of the war by holding a considerable amount of Confederate currency. Some of the old notes have been given to the MoD by a family descendant.

At the intersection, turn left (south) on Second Line.

Stop #25 Tower Hill



Confederate Currency

This was the main access road to Amaranth for many years, and the first route opened in the township. It came north from Highway 9 to 5 Sideroad and then headed west toward Grand Valley. It thus missed the steep hills and swamps on the “Town Line.”

About 1.5 kms south, just past an evergreen plantation, you crest the height known as Tower Hill. There is still a large tower on site, though now it’s a communications tower. This is the highest point in Dufferin county, at 1725 feet above sea level. It also provides a wide view over the Orangeville basin, and south to Caledon. As you descend the hill, there is a fenced yard and some trees on the right. This marks the site of the first home of Abraham and Tamar Hughson who moved to Amaranth about 1819. They lived here for a time, before moving east to the next road where there was a better supply of water.

You again cross the CPR rail right of way, and pass The Maples Independent School, reaching Dufferin Road 109, formerly Highway 9.

This was one of “The Gore” Corners. The Gore was part of Garafraxa, and the corners were created by B Line, Dufferin Road 3, 2nd Line Amaranth, and a weird anomaly in the survey that used to bring them all together at almost the same point. Things have altered a bit over the years, but from this vantage point sitting on the first road into Amaranth, you can see why Dufferin Road 3 was first called the Amaranth Settlement Road.

Amaranth...a little history.

Settlement started early in Amaranth. UE Loyalists Tamar and Abraham Hughson and their family are reputed to be the first permanent settlers in Dufferin county, arriving about 1819 from the Niagara district. Settlement began in earnest in the mid-1840s and by 1851, the population had reached 500 persons, most in the southeast quarter of the township, with a second cluster in the north near Shelburne. The population more than doubled in the next decade, reaching 1200 in 1861.

The first roads giving access to the township were the Second Line opened north from what is now Dufferin Road 109 to 5 Sideroad (the former village of Farmington) and then west toward Grand Valley; and the east

Town Line (Veteran's Way). The Victoria Road, which was the old stagecoach route from Orangeville to Shelburne, entered the township at 15 Sideroad and the First Line, ran west to Whittington, north to Kennedy's corner, west on 20 Sideroad to the Third Line then north to Shelburne (where the north end of it is still called Victoria Street).

In 1854, Amaranth was deemed to have sufficient population, voters and assessment to become an independent township. The first council was elected in 1854 and the first council meetings were held on Saturdays in Braiden's schoolhouse at Farmington.

School sections were organized, and marched with the settlement of the township. Rural service communities and postal villages developed: a blacksmith, a church, a school, maybe a store, and someone to look after the mail delivered two or three times a week.

The next big boost came with the construction of the Toronto Grey and Bruce Railway through the township: in early 1872, track was laid north through the township to Shelburne, on the route to Owen Sound. Where the roads had provided access to the markets in Orangeville, the railroads opened up the markets in Toronto to the farmers of Amaranth.

The township hit a peak population of 2914 in 1881. Then, as in the rest of the county, people started to move – north to Parry Sound, west to Dakota, and finally Manitoba and the Prairies - the population started to decline. By 1911, the township population had slipped to 2209, and continued to decline until the Second World War when the population hit 1602 in 1941.

However, this wasn't all bad news for Amaranth. Farm holdings were consolidated and enlarged. Aided by extensive drainage works subsidized by the Ontario government, the agricultural economy switched from subsistence to mixed farming, with substantial amounts of produce and livestock being sold off the farm. Buildings on rural farmsteads were improved or rebuilt. Rural communities and rural organizations developed and thrived: the Women's Institute, the Junior Farmers, livestock associations, crop improvement associations, amateur theatrical companies, and sports teams.

Following the Second World War, some returning servicemen decided to take up farming, and move their families to the country. And postwar migration from Europe to Canada, brought many new families to the township, particularly from The Netherlands. Many of these new farmers helped agriculture in Amaranth transition again into specialty markets: dairy, beef, cash crop.

By the 1960s, changing times brought about the consolidation of services and institutions in rural areas. Several United Church congregations in the township were merged, and about half of the rural United Church buildings closed. One room schools were abandoned – with children moving to central schools: Mono Amaranth in the east, Centennial Hylands in the north, Grand Valley in the west.

Since then, rural residential development along the concession roads has helped increase the population, and again modified the character of the township.

Light industrial development in the southeast corner of the township, aggregate extraction and peat extraction, wind farm development in the northern part, water bottlers, golf courses and driving ranges also help diversify the township's traditional agricultural tax base.

The Museum of Dufferin hope you have enjoyed your tour of the keystone township, and come back to explore other roads in Amaranth.