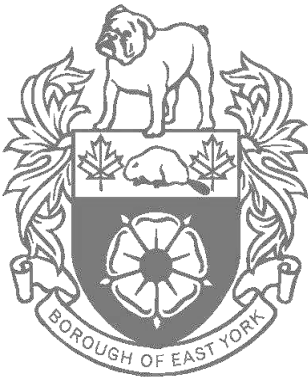


# East York Tidbits

*Stories About East York Presented by the East York Historical Society*

## THE STORY OF A BEAUTIFUL FRIENDSHIP: THE TOWN OF LEASIDE AND THE CANADA WIRE AND CABLE COMPANY

On the east side of Laird Drive stood the site of the Leaside manufacturing plant of the Canada Wire and Cable Company. Founded in 1911 by Roderick Parke, Herbert Horsfall and Emil Wallberg, in 1914 the Company purchased 16 acres of land from the York Land Company in the new Town of Leaside becoming the Town's first major industry and starting an enduring bond between the Town and the Company.



The York Land Company, the development arm of the Canadian Northern Railway, had assembled over 1,000 acres in the wilds of north Toronto. Fredrick Todd of Montreal, a town planner and landscape architect was commissioned to lay out a plan for a model town. Todd's detailed street plan included the innovative concept of separating industrial and residential lands, using Laird Drive as the dividing road. With the plan completed, in April 1913 the Province incorporated the Town of Leaside: population 43.

The symbiotic relationship between the Town and Canada Wire lasted over 80 years. Canada Wire would not have become a world leader in the production of wire and cable without its Leaside Plant. No doubt the Town would not have the reputation as one of the most attractive neighbourhoods to raise a family and to operate a business in the Toronto area, if not the entire province, without the presence of Canada Wire.

Originally, the Company produced cable to meet the demand of the Province's expanding hydro electric power network, along with wire rope for logging, mining, drilling and elevators. In 1918 it funded the construction of the Town's first water system, vital to the Town's lasting residential and industrial prosperity. Also in 1918 Canada Wire built a 117 foot water tower on their property, a Leaside landmark until 1956. Between 1918 and 1924 the Company donated the space for the Town's first school. Company workers were the Town's first volunteer fire fighters. When the Town's fire alarm sounded in the Plant, the workers would respond. The Company built over 60 houses on Airdrie Road, Randolph Road and Sutherland Drive for purchase by its workers.

The Leaside Plant made significant contributions to the nation's efforts in both world wars. During the First World War the Plant's 4,000 employees produced munitions shells, be-

coming North America's largest producer of six-inch shells. A 10 coach train from west Toronto would transport workers to and from the Leaside Plant. Its reputation as an efficient and reliable manufacturer lead the United States Army to award Leaside Munitions (a subsidiary of Canada Wire) a contract in 1918 to produce shells. So eager was the US Army to have Leaside Munitions produce shells that it financed the construction of a factory on a 5 acre site beside Canada Wire's Leaside Plant. Before a single shell could be shipped out from the new Leaside factory, the war in Europe ended and mercifully the need for shells ceased. In return for the cancelled munitions contact the US Army gave Canada Wire the newly built factory.

The Company sold the factory to Durant Motors who produced automobiles from 1924 to the mid 1930s. With the demise of Durant Motors in 1934 Canada Wire repurchased the 5 acre site to expand its production of wire and cable.

During the Second World War the Plant produced aircraft wires, navy cables, field telephone wires and anti-submarine nets to protect our nation's coastal harbours.

About 300 of the Plant's 1,200 work force enlisted to serve the nation in the Second World War. In its reception area the Company proudly displayed the Roll of Honour, inscribed with the names of the employees who served. A tiny cross by a name denotes those who made the ultimate sacrifice. Now the Roll of Honour is displayed at the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 10 on Pape Avenue.

After the war the Leaside Plant shared in the nation's economic prosperity. It was a time of confidence and optimism. In 1956 the Leaside Plant expanded to include the 9 acre site of the former Frigidaire factory. In 1959 the Company added the 100 foot high vulcanizing extruder tower, a Leaside landmark for decades. By the 1970s the Company was the nation's largest producer of cable and wire with plants from coast to coast. At its peak the Leaside Plant stretched over 25 acres and was a major employer in the Town.

The Plant continued to contribute to the wellbeing of Leaside until it ceased operations in 1996.

We salute the men and women who gave their labour and ingenuity for the betterment of the Company, the Town of Leaside and the nation.

**Prepared by John Michailidis  
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**The East York Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and sharing information about East York's rich past. The Society meets 5 times a year usually on the last Tuesday in January, March, May, September and November.**

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