

Omemee Walking Tour

The walking tour of Omemee starts at Coronation Hall located at 1 King Street West and takes you to 33 King Street West, the former house of Scott Young. Next you will walk East to Pigeon River and down to Mary Street to visit Rowan Cottage. Walk down to Omemee Beach Park at the corner of Rutland Street and George Street to the location of the old school house and then over to the railway bridge. Visit the site of the Grist Mill and move West downtown to conclude the tour. Approximate length of tour is 45 minutes.



**War Memorial, Coronation Hall
Omemee**

The Founding of Omemee

Before any European settlers arrived, before any thought of the country of Canada, the entire region from Lake Huron to the St. Lawrence River was occupied by the Mississaga Indians, a branch of the Algonquin Tribe.

By the early 1800's many settlers had made the Province on Ontario their home. Most had settled along the border of Lake Ontario, from the Niagara Peninsula to the St. Lawrence River and towards Quebec.

Following the War of 1812 between Canada and the United States, there was a massive immigration of people from the British Isles and the Government faced the idea of opening up more areas of the province.

In 1818 the Government purchased about 4,000 square miles from the Mississagas in the area which is now Peterborough and the City of Kawartha Lakes.

The first settlers were Irish Protestants from the County Fermanagh in Ireland. They settled in the Cavan region about 30 kilometers Southeast of Omemee.

In 1821 the family of Maurice Cottingham were the first family to settle in Omemee. Gradually over the next few years more and more settlers came to the area. Allen, Armstrong, Balfour, Beatty, Corneil, Curry, Davidson, English, Hughes, Hannah, Jones and Thorton are some of the founding names which are still prevalent in the area today.

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Points of Interest

1. Coronation Hall

Coronation Hall was a gift to Omemee from Mrs. J.C. Eaton (Lady Eaton). The Grand Opening was held December 19, 1911. A memorial for Omemee residents lost during the Great Wars and the Korean War is located at Coronation Hall.

2. Location where Samuel Cottingham first crossed the Pigeon River

In 1820 Maurice Cottingham and his sons Samuel and William, accompanied by their cousin Henry English and maybe James Laidley, made their way from Cavan to the present site of Omemee. Omemee was a mixed forest with blue spruce trees, maple trees, oak trees, with the beautiful Pigeon River flowing right where you are now standing right. They surveyed the land and decided on this point for a settlement. Right where you are standing is where the first clearing was made that summer.

To cross the river, young William Cottingham cut down an oak tree down and walked across. That summer they made a clearing by cutting all the underbrush and left only the tallest trees standing. That winter they returned to Cavan. In September 1997, descendents of William Cottingham planted Cottingham Oak Tree at Logan's landing (Marine Park) to replace the oak that was chopped down in order for William to become the first permanent resident to cross Pigeon River.

3. Railway Bridge

This railway was the first built through Omemee, Port Hope, Lindsay and Beaverton. Every morning a train left Lindsay Station bound for Port Hope and returned in the evening. In 1879 the railway was extended to Midland and this line became known as the Midland Railway. Missing link: Lindsay to Peterborough. From Omemee you could travel anywhere in the province via connecting trains in Toronto, Lindsay, Peterborough and Port Hope.

In 1926, with the increase in motorized cars, the train schedule was reduced and around 1930 there

wasn't much train traffic across the bridge. In 2000, the former CNR line became part of the Trans Canada Trail. The Old Train Station still exists hidden behind houses on Sturgeon Street. The Railway Bridge, part of "the missing link" between Lindsay and Peterborough, was built in 1883. Prior to the building of this line travellers connected at Millbrook. The trestle was constructed to permit the passage of small steamboats to the King Street Bridge.

4. Rowan Cottage

Now known as Rowan Cottage, this is another house that was owned by William Cottingham Jr. Following the fires at the Cottingham residences, he bought this cottage and sold the King Street property to the Church.

5. Old School House

The first school was built in 1849. Here stood Omemee's second school -- a framed, two storey, with an organized grammar, or High School, on the second floor. Year by year wings were added as the village grew. The final wing was built in 1876. Eight years later the school burned to the ground. A second school house was built and in 1904 it burned as well. It wasn't for another year until a new school was built and again in 1964 this brick school house went up in flames. However, the bell was saved and now has a place in Lady Eaton Public School. In 1956 a new school was built at the present site of Lady Eaton Public School and that school has grown ever since. In 1994, Scott Young Public School was erected at the West end of town to house grades 5 – 8.

6. Mills/Grist Mill

A Grist Mill is a simple structure in which two large stones rub, roll and grind together, so wheat and grain crops can be made into flour. It would look like a small cabin with a traditional looking water wheel on the side on an axle with the grinding stones inside. In 1825, young William Cottingham completed the first Grist Mill in the City of Kawartha Lakes. Several mills along the Pigeon River have burned down.

7. Omemee Downtown

Omemee's Downtown has seen many different businesses, many different buildings and many different wonderful events. The Ivory and Williamson Block, now partly occupied by Omemee Foodland was built in 1890 – 1891. When it was completed the Ivory Store, at the left end, was considered the finest in Victoria County. Mulligan's drug store, now Countryside Pharmacy, was also built in 1891. When R.J. Mulligan died in 1918, S.J. Mackey took over and provided Omemee and area with serum for the great influenza epidemic. The Grady Building, now partly occupied by Ocean Star Chinese Restaurant and was built in 1892. Until 1967 the building housed the post office. Evans & Ridpath's Foundry & Machine Factory, which is now Harry Brown Branch, Royal Canadian Legion was built about 1879. The shop operated by waterpower from the river and manufactured along with other machinery, hand fire engines.

8. Former House of Scott Young & Son Neil Young

Scott Young is one of Canada's most prolific writers who spent half of his productive life in this house built in 1899. He was a war correspondent, an Avro Arrow promoter, historian, novelist, political observer, reporter of royal homes, interviewer on Hockey Night in Canada and juvenile novelist. He was a Globe & Mail columnist, won the national newspaper award, CBC Wilderness Award and was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame.

Neil Young is the son of Scott Young and Edna "Rassy" Young. Neil was born in Toronto and spent his formative years in the Omemee area. Neil was a member of the rock group Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, and charter member of Buffalo Springfield. He earned multiple gold records, and is a best selling musician. The family owned a farm Southeast of Omemee which Neil repurchased for the entire Young family in 1993. At the age of five Neil contracted polio and was moved to Sick Kids Hospital in Toronto. Following that, his parent's marriage fell apart and Neil moved to Winnipeg with his mother. Neil's experiences in Omemee will forever be immortalized in his hit "Helpless".