

An Unfinished Timeline: The Pleasant Valley Mobile Home Park Eviction

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I first came across information on the Pleasant Valley Mobile Home Park Eviction while looking through the newspaper clipping archives at Mississauga Central Library. The topic was something that I found myself unable to ignore due to the sheer number of clippings that were completely dedicated to the event. I couldn't stop myself from thinking that it seemed like a poignant example of the negative impact of modernist city planning. Of course, this was a slightly naive hypothesis to have, as I would soon learn there were multiple socio-political events occurring during the few years of the eviction both before and after the city's amalgamation. These events provide insight into why and how the residents of Pleasant Valley were displaced from their homes.

In this piece I am hoping to assemble a timeline of the events regarding the eviction from the information I have been able to gather from the newspaper clippings at the Mississauga Library Archives, and city council notes from September 1967 to January 1969 which were accessible as microfiche reels at the Peel Art Gallery Museum and Archives. Unfortunately, there are still significant holes in the timeline, and the lack of a definitive ending in the documentation means from a narrative perspective, it's currently a cliffhanger.

Pre-Eviction History: 1952 to 1967

In 1952 Pleasant Valley Mobile Home Park (PVMHP) was jointly purchased by Sam Gains and Mary and Dante Cuomo. Gains ran the park, Mary Cuomo worked as the park secretary, and Dante Cuomo ran the park store. The PVMHP was located on the west bank of the Etobicoke Creek just north of Lakeshore Road on lots 4 and 5, Cons. 2, SDS in a region of pre-amalgamation Mississauga which is still referred to as Lakeview. The park itself was 15 acres, with 11 streets, access to hydro and water, and each mobile home having its own septic tank. In 1954 when Hurricane Hazel hit the region it caused significant destruction and flooded the Etobicoke Creek, damaging low-lying sections of the mobile home park. In 1955 Sam Gains sold his share in the mobile home park to Mary and Dante Cuomo. (Hicks, 2005)

In a survey completed in 1958 regarding all mobile home parks in the ward, it was recorded that within Pleasant Valley there were "116 trailers" which were home to a total of 367 people, 243 of whom are listed within the age group of "20+", and the remainder of which were children and youth. This survey also noted the number of permanent and non-permanent "trailers". Within Pleasant Valley, 108 of the 116 "trailers" served as permanent housing for their residents. Pleasant Valley was home to a much different resident population than the Cuomos were expecting, as it was recorded that the park was initially designed for visiting American tourists. ("Trailer Court Review 1959", 1959)

Unfortunately, Hurricane Hazel was not the last of the troubles the residents would experience. In October 1967 the Township council requested the Peel County Health Unit to inspect 21 of

the trailers on Bluecrest Ave. in PVMHP, as these trailers were not adequately connected to the sewer system. These trailers would not be able to receive their license if there was nothing done to improve the situation. The cut-off date for the sanitary improvements for these 21 trailers was May 21, 1968 or 30 days after the Ontario Ministry of Health registered a decision. ("General Committee Report Dated October 18, 1967", 1967; "General Committee Meeting Minutes, Report 39", 1967)

The Cuomo family continued to run and refurbish the park until November 13, 1963 when the park was purchased by Lakeshore Towers of Peel Limited. The name of the new purchaser alone provided a clear idea of what was being planned for the parcel of land that the mobile home park stood on. The park continued to run for the next five years under new park manager Lloyd Hall through Lakeshore Towers Limited, until the eviction in November 1967. The residents were given 30 days to leave. This would be the first of many eviction deadlines for the residents. (Hicks, 2005)

Eviction History: 1967 to 1969

The eviction notice was met with immediate action on behalf of Pleasant Valley residents. A clipping from the December 13, 1967 Mississauga News titled "Mobile Owners Unite" notes the formation of an association in order to "secure accommodation as soon as possible". Ron Riley became the president of this group – the Mobile Home Owners Association (MHOA) – which would lobby the Township council and seek public support. On the same day as recorded in the Report of the General Committee Meeting an amendment was passed to change the zoning for the parcel of land PVMHP sat on from "to be determined" to "residential" or "green belt". ("Mobile Owners Unite", 1967; "Report of the General Committee Meeting Held in the Committee Room, December 13, 1967", 1967)

By December 28, 1967 the news of the eviction at PVMHP reached the provincial legislature. In an article written by Ed Belitsky in the Mississauga News, Ron Knight the liberal MPP for Port Arthur, was noted as speaking out on behalf of the residents at PVMHP. Knight had just purchased a mobile home himself, and was discouraged to see other mobile home owners being displaced. He provided a rationalization for the displacement and was quoted as saying "It is assumed that municipalities are reluctant to grant licenses to such parks because of the notion that they are unable to carry the tax load". Within the article Belitsky outlines the payments made by mobile home owners, which include \$15 per mobile home per month to the township for "schools, police and fire protection". This is in addition to the \$40 to \$70 per month rental fee. Knight's support for mobile homes was significant as he stated that mobile home parks "are the answer to the housing problem". Mississauga, or the Township of Toronto at the time, was also in the midst of a housing crisis. This housing crisis was a major factor in the move towards increased housing density. (Belitsky, 1967)

In 1968 the Township of Toronto was formally amalgamated into Mississauga. On February 7, 1968 the General Committee of Mississauga established a meeting with Lloyd Hall, the

PVMHP's park manager and Ron Riley, the president of the Mobile Home Owners Association (MHOA). Both Hall and Riley were interested in gaining support for relocation efforts for the mobile home owners at PVMHP. ("Report of the General Committee Meeting Held in the Committee Room, February 7, 1968", 1968)

By March 20, 1968 a new eviction deadline was established for May 1, 1968. An article in the South Peel Weekly by Ron Dennis features a plea for public support. Interestingly, the article was under a section dedicated to Pleasant Valley, which provides a sense of the gravity of the events within the community at the time. In addition to this, it also provided a new census of the park as completed by MHOA. It was recorded that there were 127 families, which in later articles was confirmed as reflective of 127 mobile homes. These families consisted of 226 adults and 110 children. There are no age ranges provided to further clarify these statistics. (Dennis, 1968)

A few days later on April 3, 1968 at a meeting of the General Council and later reflected in an April 10, 1968 article in the South Peel Weekly, the public was provided with a review of councillors' views regarding mobile homes and the residents of PVMHP. Councillor Searle identified the urgency of the situation and said that it would be correct for the government to make a decision as soon as possible. Councillor Kennedy suggested a relocation of the park. This was also noted by Planning Director Harry Petscher who felt the town was capable of finding a place for the residents. The general support was echoed by Councillor Kehoe who stated that the municipality had a "moral obligation" to assist residents of the mobile home park and he showed support for the eviction deadline extension date of May 1, 1968. ("Report of the General Committee Meeting Held in the Committee Room, April 3, 1968", 1968; "Council Seek "Place to Go" for Pleasant Valley", 1968)

Not all councillors showed support for the residents of PVMHP or the potential relocation. Councillor Parsons noted that the price of land in the region did not make the opening and maintaining of a mobile home park worth it for individuals. Councillor Frank Mckechnie expressed general concern over creating a new mobile home park. Reeve Charles Murray displayed distaste for the mobile home park as he noted no other place "between Trenton and Hamilton" had mobile home parks. Murray stated "it's time some other municipality took some of them". This point was countered by Councillor Searle who noted that that was no reason to displace the group of residents.

Mayor Robert Speck perhaps had the most overt dislike for mobile home parks stating "I don't agree with the establishment of a Pleasant Valley type camp" and that "he favoured the type of tourist trailer park where people move in and out on a regular basis". This information displays the contentiousness of the eviction as well as the class-based undertones which were certain to exist within it. After all, even if this eviction was not named as gentrification, it carried the hallmarks of it. ("Report of the General Committee Meeting Held in the Committee Room, April 3, 1968", 1968; "Council Seek "Place to Go" for Pleasant Valley", 1968)

Soon enough the May 1, 1968 eviction deadline passed and a new deadline for July 1, 1968 was established. As well, the licencing issue based on 21 mobile homes on Bluecrest Ave. in PVMHP and their connection to the sewer also had its deadline pushed back from July 31, 1968 to May 31, 1969. ("Report of the General Committee Meeting Held in the Committee Room, May 1, 1968", 1968)

The July, 1 1968 deadline also passed, and would not be re-established until later.

In July, an article titled "Deadline Nears for Trailer Camp" noted that it was decided that the sewage issue was significant and had to be dealt with. In regards to the eviction the residents were facing as a whole, the City identified six possible relocations for the mobile home park. In addition to this it was noted that Ron Riley of MHOA had been in contact with individuals in Cookstown who were interested in starting up a mobile camp. It can be inferred from the available information that the Cookstown Park did not come into fruition, at least not for those at PVMHP. ("Deadline Nears For Trailer Camp", 1968)

On June 10, 1968 the eviction deadline was extended to May 1, 1969 as the city established that the time was necessary for further negotiations. Councillor Kennedy attempted to pass the motion that "no further permanent trailer courts be established in Mississauga". The motion was not passed, with all of the other councillors and mayor voting against Kennedy. ("Report of the General Committee Meeting Held in the Committee Room, July 10, 1968", 1968)

On July 11, 1968 a news article in the South Peel Weekly outlined changes in leadership in MHOA. John Gailey became president of the association resulting in some negative reactions from Pleasant Valley residents. There was no additional sources of information regarding the change in leadership or the internal contention it caused. ("Future Becomes Unpleasant at 'Pleasant Valley' Camp", 1968)

In September some of the confusion around the date of eviction for the park in its totality was clarified at a General Committee Meeting. A Mr. Fidani was present and asked the council to confirm May 31, 1969 as an official eviction deadline for the entire park. This was confirmed. ("Report of the General Committee Meeting Held in the Committee Room, September 4, 1968", 1968)

In late September 1968 the council established a plan for relocation, and began looking into land owned by the Ontario Water Resource Commission (OWRC) as a relocation option. This property was later referred to as the Arsenal Lands. It can be inferred that this land was likely the Small Arms munitions plant shooting range and barracks just south of Lakeshore Road East and just west of the mobile home park. This seems the most likely considering the history of the land which at one point housed families in the barracks. In addition to this a 300-name petition was submitted indicating support for the residents and the relocation of the park. ("Pleasant Valley Gets Public Sympathy But Hopes for Relocation Dampened", 1968)

By October 2, 1968, 20 mobile homes had left PVMHP. Where exactly these families went is unknown. At this point a 500-name petition from other mobile home owners in Mississauga in support of the residents was submitted to Council. It became clear that the previous pleas for compassion were answered on the part of the local community. It was also at this time that the council's plan for potential relocation was unveiled. It suggested a ten-year relocation process where a piece of land would be used at full capacity for the first seven years and wind down the park over the last three years. ("20 Pleasant Valley Families Escape Axe: Move out Early", 1968)

MHOA continued to lobby and on October 16, 1968 as recorded in an article in the South Peel Weekly there was a presentation made to Transportation Minister Paul Hellyer and the housing task force. In this presentation MHOA suggested that mobile homes were a more progressive way of life. This is an understandable and quite a smart argument for them to make considering the obsession with progressive living arrangements at this time. ("Pleasant Valley Homeowners Present Brief to Hellyer", 1968)

Over the last months of 1968 the council continued to look into obtaining the Arsenal Lands. The request by Mississauga council was eventually rejected and it became extremely important that other options would need to be sought out on behalf of the residents. Thankfully there were multiple proposals from local business owners and interested investors. ("Report of the General Committee Meeting Held in the Committee Room, October 16, 1968", 1968; "Report of the General Committee Meeting Held in the Committee Room, October 30, 1968", 1968; "Report of the General Committee Meeting Held in the Committee Room, November 20, 1968", 1968)

The first proposal came from Mr. Don Pallett, who suggested an 18-acre piece of land on Dundas Street, across from the Dixie Fruit Market. The Council had no objection to Mr. Pallett's proposal, but there is currently no evidence that this plan was ever put into action. ("Report of the General Committee Meeting Held in the Committee Room, December 18, 1968", 1968)

The next proposal occurred in May 1969 and came from Mr. Switzer of the Shipp Corporation Limited which included a 50-acre site with a running time of 15 years. There is no further record of this proposal being enacted. ("Report of the General Committee Meeting Held in the Committee Room, May 16, 1969", 1969)

The most financially thought out proposal was presented to council on May 21, 1969 by Mrs. Chaplin and Mr. Pat Burke. Mrs. Chaplin was advised by Mr. Chappell, MP for Peel South, to sign an offer to purchase 18 acres at the northwest corner of Hazelhurst Road and Highway 2. This was done with the intention to develop 100 permanent spaces and 27 temporary spaces. In addition to this the estimated cost of development was also identified as \$300,000 to \$600,000 and a rental cost of \$76,000 per year. The purchase of the site was conditional upon Mrs. Chaplin being able to obtain rezoning for the site. Unfortunately the rezoning request would be rejected a month later. ("Report of the General Committee Meeting Held in the Committee Room, May 21, 1969", 1969)

In the report outlining Mrs. Chaplin's proposal it was also noted that there were still 37 mobile homes at PVMHP, 12 of which had no formal plans to leave on the eviction deadline of May 31, 1969. ("Report of the General Committee Meeting Held in the Committee Room, May 21, 1969", 1969)

May 31, 1969 came and passed. There are no recordings of what happened to the 12 homes with no moving arrangements or where exactly any of the other families had gone to. ("Report of the General Committee Meeting Held in the Committee Room, May 21, 1969", 1969)

This is where the timeline ends and although this information has provided answers it has left far more questions. It is still unclear where the residents went after they had left the park, or if any of the unopposed proposals were implemented. And what happened to the last 12 mobile homes; were they pushed out at a different time?

Finding a definitive ending to the timeline is made difficult by the fact the City of Mississauga does not have any demolition records for PVMHP.

Understanding "The Why"

Other than the purchase of the park with the intention to turn it into the apartment buildings that still stand on its premises, there were another two key elements that I have spoken to at points in the timeline including the planning and design logic of the 1960s and the Mississauga housing crisis.

The modernist planning and design ideas of the 1960s was an element that I noted right from the beginning, and although it is naive to suggest it's the only factor, it would be even more so to not recognise it at all. In simple terms city planning ideas at this time were largely focused on the ideals of self-contained, vertical, futurist living. Anything that was new and offered the ability to live in a space that created a separation between the resident and the street, was seen as the best way to live. Coming from this design logic, PVMHP could easily be illustrated to be a "dirty" place. This conclusion was likely perpetuated further by the sewage connection issue on Bluecrest Avenue. This likely pushed interest toward the tower development, regardless of how incorrectly it may have portrayed Pleasant Valley. (Sewell, 1993)

The proposal for the towers had to have been made before 1967, prior to the rezoning of the land which places it in the later to mid-section of the timeframe for when this kind of planning was extremely popular. It is understandable that with the way Mississauga was hoping to market itself - which are particularly evident in videos such as the Cinderella City - the city wanted to exude a sense of newness and cleanliness. This planning logic fits in quite well with the brand identity the city was trying to develop, even as Mississauga pushed to attract residents. (Sewell, 1993)

The housing crisis undoubtedly was a significant factor in the displacement of the families at Pleasant Valley. The mobile home park was likely perceived to hold less people than two large towers. Due to this any form of housing that could potentially hold a significant number of

residents would be seen as ideal for the city. This is likely also the reason that the relocation was taken so seriously by the city, as any way to obtain space for housing was vital for the city's continued growth. ("Ready to Provide 25,000 Homes Now", 1967)

In addition to these points it's important to recognise the discriminatory class-based sentiments that likely also had a significant effect on the displacement of the residents. This seems to have been a perspective that was especially alive in Mississauga considering the frequent early rejections of subsidised housing in the city and the eventual accusation that Mississauga did not want any subsidised housing at all.

Despite these few explanations there is still a mystery around exactly what happened to those who lived at Pleasant Valley. The greatest question of all is still "Where did these people go?" There are many potential places to which the residents could have moved their mobile homes - that is, if they continued to live inside their mobile homes at all.

I am hoping to continue to research this piece of local history, if you have or know anyone with information about where these residents could have gone I'd be happy to hear from you. You can reach me through email at commontransmission@gmail.com

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Resources

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