

## Season's Greetings



**Grist to the Mill, Toronto Winter 1835 by Rowley Murphy**

**HDH**

As winter bore down on pioneer Toronto, rivers, canals, and lakeshores froze, causing Great Lake shipping to grind to a virtual halt ... sometimes literally. One strategy for weathering winter was for ships' captains and owners to deliberately beach their vessels, and use them as winter warehouses until spring break-up.

In the 1930s, when Gooderham & Worts was celebrating its Centennial, Toronto marine artist, Rowley Murphy, recreated this pre-Victorian scene of industry and pleasure on the ice just south of the company's grist mill. Prominent journalist and Great Lakes historian, C.H.J. Snider, had described the winter warehousing ... and Murphy brought it to life.

In 1835, when this scene was set, the wind was no longer Gooderham's main power source for the grist mill. One of Toronto (or York's) first steam engines had been purchased in 1833 and installed in the brick building with a tall chimney to the left (or west) of the windmill. Two, possibly three, runs (or pairs) of millstones ground grain for individual farmers and larger merchants in the six-story grist mill. Three tall-masted schooners were frozen in the shallows awaiting attention.

Of particular interest is the unloading of the largest ship where a worker is scooping grain out of the hold with a wooden grain plough attached to the rigging, and dumping it into the two-horse freight sleigh. Opportunistic sea gulls wheel around overhead waiting for grain to spill. To the right, a successful native fisher trudges across the ice bearing his catch. A sled-puller appears to be hauling either sacks of grain or, more likely, carcasses of pigs destined for festive dinner tables.

Family groupings are scattered about. A Scotsman sporting a blue-and-red tam o'shanter holds the hand of a young child while conversing with a fur-hatted friend in blue great coat. A warmly, if poorly, dressed woman manoeuvres a baby bundled into a push sled toward the officer and his lady out for an icy promenade. Given the generic costume of the officer, it's impossible to identify his regiment or precise rank. In 1835, the most likely was the 15<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot stationed at Fort York. But he could have been from several other regiments or even serving the Lieutenant Governor. Meanwhile his lady is dressed in style, with poke bonnet, fur muffler, purple coat, and long blue dress.

At the end of a cold day like this, early Torontonians headed home for a simple December 25<sup>th</sup> holiday. Church. Family and friends. And as lavish a feast as they could afford, perhaps including goodies made from flour ground at the Gooderham grist mill by the Bay.



**Season's Greetings 2007**

Thanks to Carl Benn for sharing his knowledge of early military life in Toronto.

Please send your comments or questions to Manager of Heritage Services, Sally Gibson, [sg@thedistillerydistrict.com](mailto:sg@thedistillerydistrict.com).

For more about the history of the Distillery District, visit [www.distilleryheritage.com](http://www.distilleryheritage.com).