

## A Winter Scene 1835



**Toronto Bay from Taylor's Wharf 1835**

**TPL – JRR 842**

*E*ye-witness accounts of Toronto in the 1830s are extremely rare. And images rarer still. So this watercolour, based directly on a painting by John George Howard, ranks near the top of significant views of William Gooderham's windmill. The perspective is an interesting one. Looking eastward toward the windmill from near the foot of Frederick Street, the artist captured the sweeping arc of the shoreline to the mouth of the Don River, and diverse activity on the frozen bay.

Architect, surveyor and drawing master, John George Howard arrived in York in 1832, the same year as William Gooderham, part of that great bump of British immigration propelled elsewhere by recession in the old country. As one of the earliest trained architects in Toronto, Howard had a distinct impact on the appearance and form of the city, especially in the 1830s and 1840s. Not only was Howard a successful independent architect, but he was also Toronto's first City Surveyor and City Engineer, Drawing Master at Upper Canada College, and, of course, the man who developed and donated High Park and Colborne Lodge to the City of Toronto. Each activity made a distinct mark on his adopted city, and our knowledge of it.

Howard devoted a good deal of time to the waterfront, surveying the mainland, the harbour, and the peninsula (later the Toronto Island). He also left us paintings of waterfront buildings and scenes that enable us to conjure up life in the garrison town and burgeoning Victorian city.

The view from Taylor's Wharf is alive with recreational activity and a bit of dangerous work. Dogs bark. Gentlemen and boys skate – with greater and lesser skill. One- and two-horse open sleighs convey passengers efficiently across the icy “roadway,” guided by small evergreens planted in the ice. This was a ploy adopted for many years by Toronto Islanders when the bay still froze over. After Christmas, they would stick their trees into the ice to ensure that homeward-bound pedestrians didn't get lost during a white-out ... and walk to their deaths in the open waters of Lake Ontario beyond the island.

In the lower-right portion of Howard's painting, workers are “harvesting” ice. Standing perilously close to open water, a couple of icemen are sawing chunks of ice from the frozen bay. The ladder lying on the ice may have been there as a life-saving aid in case someone slipped into the frigid waters. Meanwhile, a co-worker sets off toward the mainland with his heavily laden sleigh to deposit blocks at ice houses for storage until they were needed during warmer weather.



**Wm Gooderham's house?**

**Gooderham's windmill 1835**

**Don River**

The close-up of the windmill and assorted buildings, shows Gooderham's windmill the year after his first partner, James Worts, died and two year's before the distillery was added. Significantly, Howard's view is from a different angle than the one adopted by most other early views. It clearly shows the relationship between the windmill complex and the mouth of the Don River to the right. It shows the windmill full-on, with its sails adding to the building's height and landmark status. And it shows a different view of the wooden structures clustered near the base of the mill. In fact, William Gooderham's first house may be one of the larger buildings to the west (left) of the windmill, which was replaced about 15 years later by a Victorian villa where the Pure Spirit condominium now rises.

Although signed “J. G. Howard,” the painting is almost certainly a later copy of Howard’s original painting, which is owned by the City of Toronto. The numbers associated with various buildings indicate that the painting was made for John Ross Robertson, who described it in one of his volumes of *Landmarks of Toronto* and donated it, along with hundreds of other items, to the Toronto Public Library. The name of the copy artist is not known, but his work appears to be accurate ... and delightful.

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)