

# History and Heritage of Hillsburgh

Welcome to the historic downtown and mill pond districts of Hillsburgh.

This self-guided tour can be completed in just under one hour. It includes the natural beauty of the Elora Cataract Trailway – the last remnant of the Credit Valley Railway, which provided a valuable link to Toronto in 1879. The ponds were created by mill entrepreneurs such as the distillery firm of Gooderham & Worts, and now support an array of wildlife. See the intricate brickwork and creative window designs from the Victorian era, and learn about the mill industry that helped establish a thriving agricultural economy here in the 1800s. The tour is in two zones and the sites can be visited in any order. From the corner of Trafalgar Road and Station Street (where the Fire Hall and Century Church Theatre are located), follow either Station Street to the ponds, or Trafalgar Road to the downtown core.

The village is at the headwaters of the West Branch of the Credit River, known for its pure, cold water and trout fishing as it flows towards Lake Ontario. With significant lands in Ontario's Greenbelt, Hillsburgh is a village within the Town of Erin, preserving its natural heritage of forest, wetlands and prime agricultural land.

With a lively economy, a strong arts and sports culture, a high level of safety and a plan for moderate growth, the Town of Erin has been identified as one of the Top 100 Places to Live in Canada.

Please visit our shops and restaurants, get to know our friendly people and admire the small-town architecture that is being preserved for generations to come.

## Find out more

This Walking Trail brochure is a joint project of the Town of Erin Trails and Heritage Committees.

The Trails Committee promotes a trails network for access to natural areas, transportation links and fitness benefits. The Heritage Committee promotes public awareness of the Town's heritage, maintains an inventory of properties of heritage value, and advises Town Council and property owners on conservation issues and heritage matters.

The committees offer their thanks to local property owners and businesses for their support of this Heritage Trail project. Special thanks to Wellington County Planning for technical production of this brochure.

Please feel free to visit:  
**Town of Erin:** [www.erin.ca](http://www.erin.ca) (PDF copy available)  
**County of Wellington:** [www.wellington.ca](http://www.wellington.ca)  
**Greenbelt Foundation:** [www.greenbelt.ca/foundation](http://www.greenbelt.ca/foundation)

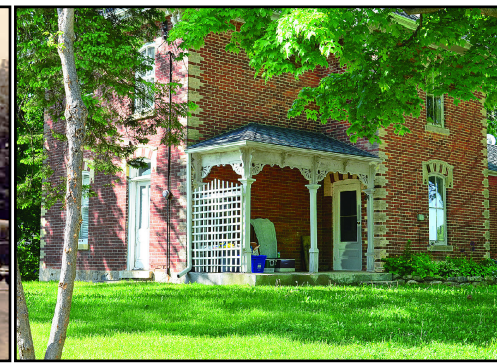
For information and a brochure about the Let's Get Hillsburgh Growing Committee, go to:  
[www.erin.ca/town-hall/hillsburgh-growing-committee](http://www.erin.ca/town-hall/hillsburgh-growing-committee)



3. Library and Mill Pond



4. Train Station and Trailhead



7. Historic Nodwell Farmhouse



# HILLSBURG(H) HERITAGE WALKING TRAIL



8. Hyndman House



9. St. Andrew's Church



10. Town Hall and date stone next door



14. East Commercial Block



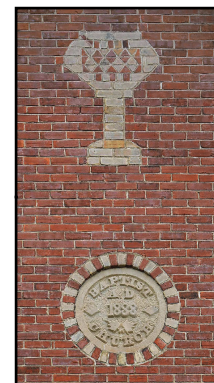
17. Exchange Hotel



18. Church Street



18. Ann Street



Baptist Church\*

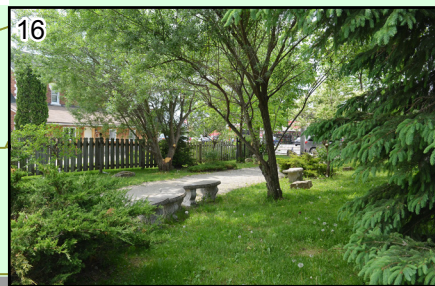


Former How General Store\*

\*Two additional Hillsburgh buildings, outside the range of this walking tour, are also worth a look. Well south of downtown is the Hillsburgh Baptist Church on the east side of Trafalgar. It has an 1888 date stone, plus an image of a chalice cup, both created with alternating red and yellow bricks. Across the road, a little to the south is the location of the village's first general store by village founder William How. This is the third How General Store built in the vicinity. It was first a log trading post, then a building that was destroyed in a gun powder explosion and the present building that stands today is the last version.

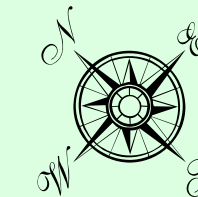
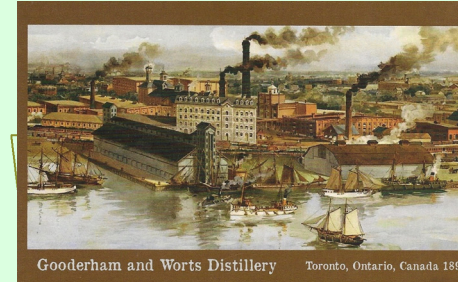






# Hillsburg(h) Heritage Walking Trail

See Hillsburg(h)'s heritage and natural features on a tour that takes less than 1 hour.



Gooderham & Worts Distillery District Toronto



**1. Disciples Church (Century Church Theatre)**  
The Christian Disciples Church was built in 1906, with 63 charter members from the Coningsby congregation. It has an impressive Gothic Revival bell tower. The Erin Arts Foundation now operates the building as Century Church Theatre, preserving the stained-glass windows and original curved elm pews and raked (sloped) floor.



**2. Station Street Bridge, Dam and Gooderham & Worts**  
There had been mills in Hillsburgh dating back to 1824, but in 1851 distillers Gooderham & Worts bought land along the river and built a large grist mill and pond, along with a saw mill up-river and a coopers to produce barrels for their Toronto-based business today known as the historic "Distillery District". The road over the dam was built to connect the village with the train station on the west side of the pond when the Credit Valley Railway arrived in 1879. The current bridge was the first bridge built in 1917 by local stone mason Charles Smith.



**3. Library and Mill Pond**  
In 2015, Wellington County acquired the upper mill pond and the 1892 house at 9 Station Street as the site of the new Hillsburgh library. The library will incorporate the brick walls of the house, one of two built by the Awrey brothers, who bought the land from John Gooderham in 1890. The pond once had a pavilion, band shell and wharf. The Awreys built a stone mill with a cider press on the lower (smaller) Ainsworth pond.



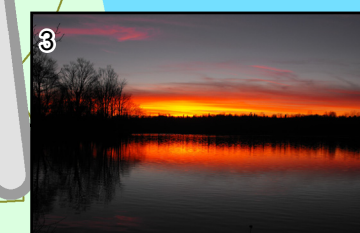
**4. Train Station and Trail Head**  
A branch line of the Credit Valley Railway started at the village of Cataract and extended through Erin, Hillsburgh, Orton, Fergus and Elora. It enabled Hillsburgh area farmers to easily transport their potatoes and other crops to market, and brought in many visitors and cattle merchants. It was operated for many years by Canadian Pacific, but abandoned in 1988. The right-of-way was purchased by the Grand River and Credit Valley Conservation Authorities in 1993 and became the scenic Elora Cataract Trailway.



**5. Upper Hillsburgh Mill Pond Lookout**  
The upper Hillsburgh Mill Pond owners have included Gooderham & Worts, the exclusive Caledon Mountain Trout Club and the Guelph Fishing Club. It provides a spectacular view and a habitat for fish, birds, bats and turtles. The Town and County of Wellington are hoping that more hiking trails can be developed in the area.

**6. "God's Acre" Pioneer Cemetery**  
The first record of the cemetery that became known as God's Acre is from 1831, back when Hillsburgh was still known as Howville. Village founder William How was buried here in 1854, among other early settlers, but for many years the site was overgrown with weeds. In 1954, Dan Gray and Robert Nodwell led an effort to restore the headstones, embedding them in concrete. A Union Church also once was on this lot.

**7. Historic Nodwell Farmhouse**  
A pre-confederation 1864 farmhouse of architectural interest, set well to the east of Trafalgar Road across from the fire station, was home to generations of the Nodwell family, and a social hub for the entire village. A smaller late 1800's Nodwell house closer to the road also displays innovative window bricking from the Victorian era.



**8. Hyndman House**  
Local carpenter Alexander Hyndman built this brick-veneered frame house for himself in 1879-1880, in the High Victorian Gothic style that was popular for Ontario country homes in the late 1800s. It was part of a subdivision planned by George Gooderham, whose family had invested in the new Credit Valley Railway line nearby. Other early owners were Dr. Joshua Hamilton and Elias Griner, the village stationmaster.

**9. St. Andrews Church and Manse**  
Local Presbyterians formed a congregation in 1860 and built their church in 1869, named St. Andrew's in honor of their Scottish ancestry. There was still no fire department in the village in 1965 when the church was almost destroyed by flames. The organ was saved, but only the stone walls remained standing. The church has been fully restored, and the manse is now a private residence.

**10. Town Hall and date stone next door**  
Attractive date stones appear on the old Town Hall and the house next door. Hillsburgh was the original name of the village, with the "h" at the end coming into use some time after World War Two - the "h" date is still debated locally! The Town Hall date stone features maple leaves and a beaver. The building was home at various times to the Loyal Orange Lodge, the Public Library, the Hillsburgh Band and, from 1962 to 2009, Morette's Furniture.

**11. St. John's Anglican Church**  
Unique window designs add elegance to this 1890s church, which had to close during the difficult years just around and after the end of World War I. It served for a time as a honey extracting plant, and was later converted with much work and dedication to a private residence.

**12. Chevrolet dealership**  
The commercial building across from the arena was once much larger, housing up to six stores including a drug store and butcher shop. It is also known as one of Canada's earliest Chevrolet dealerships containing an indoor showroom.

**13. The Hillsburgh Community Centre**  
Built right beside the West Credit, it once housed the Fire Department and had a tiny library building next door on the riverbank. It now boasts a banquet hall that can handle 225 people and an arena that has been adapted for sledge hockey.

**14. East Side Commercial Block**  
Unlike the West Side Block, which was demolished to make way for a grocery store, the East Side preserves the character of the old downtown with a variety of brick styles, anchored by the Royal Bank, originally the Union Bank.

**15. Butcher Furniture**  
Hillsburgh has a long history of furniture manufacturing and retailing. This store was established in 1959 by Dave and Betty Butcher. It has grown to 12,000 ft<sup>2</sup>, with a second location opened in Orangeville in 2004. The stores are now owned by Marvin and Nancy McDougall.

**16. Hillsburgh Historical Park**  
Once the site of a general store, the lot sat vacant for many years until the Town developed a small park with the assistance of the Hillsburgh & District Lions Club, the Hillsburgh Garden Club and other volunteers. It has benches for relaxing, beautiful gardens, historical artifacts and a stage for concerts and events. It is used for church services and the annual Christmas Tree Lighting.

**17. Exchange Hotel**  
A local landmark built about 1883 by Bill Dwier, in the prosperous years that followed the railway construction, the Exchange was classier than its Hillsburgh rival, the Grand Central Hotel. It had elements of Italianate and Second Empire design, with an archway leading to the livery stable. Above the arch was a "sample room" where travelling salesmen would set up displays. It once served as a headquarters for the well-to-do members of the Caledon Mountain Trout Club, and the parlour was a favourite meeting place of Erin Township Council. In 2012 it was refurbished with ground floor commercial and residential units above.

**18. A walk along Church and Ann Streets**  
To the east of Trafalgar Road are a number of interesting homes from the Victorian era. The tree lined streets feature homes with decorative brick lintels over the windows, decorative corner treatments and ornate wood and metal trim.