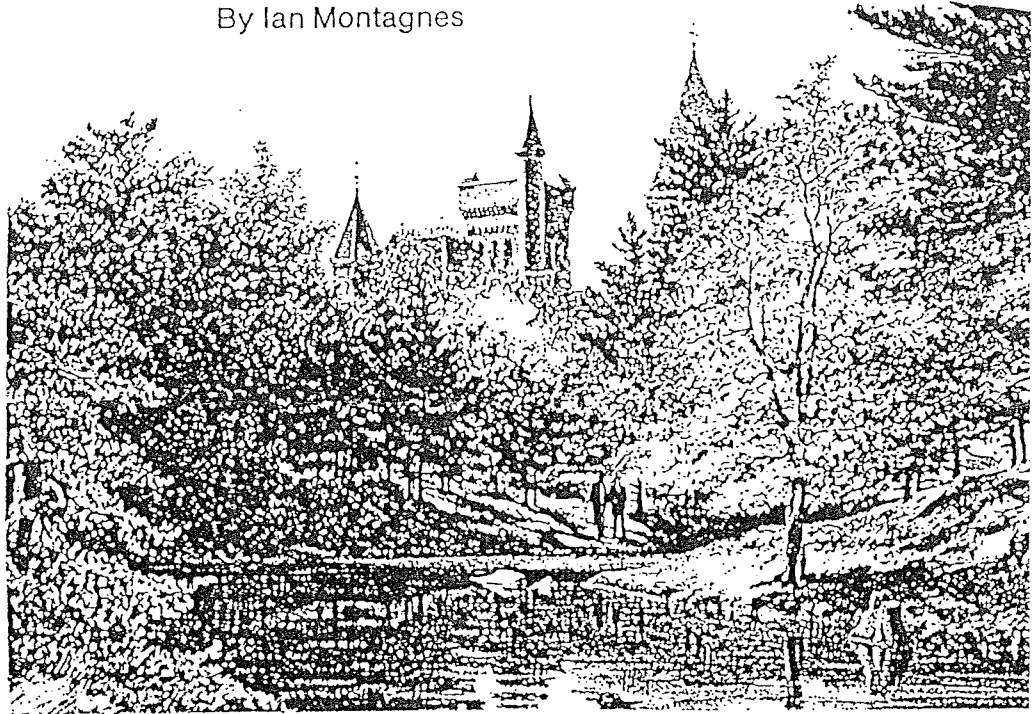


# TADDLE TALE

By Ian Montagnes

Reprinted from  
"The Graduate",  
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(U.ofT. Alumni  
Magazine).

The painting is  
"University  
College, 1876"  
by Lucius O'Brien,  
U.ofT. Archives.  
View is SW across  
the upper end of  
McCaul's Pond.



Once a clear stream ran through the University grounds. Students fished in the pond it formed where Hart House now stands, and trapped wild rabbits in the bush which filled its valley up to Bloor Street. In fine weather they drowsed on its banks under clumps of pine and balsam; in autumn they used its waters in initiation rites. They called it Taddle Creek.

That was more than a century ago, when the stones of University College were new. But the Taddle—long since forced underground—has never let itself be completely forgotten. Still flowing, it remains one of the few sources of folklore indigenous to the campus; and along its buried course it links the earliest days of town and gown.

The Taddle crossed the campus from north to south, flowing (to follow modern landmarks) beside Philosopher's Walk, beneath Wycliffe and Hart House, through the gully behind the Sigmund Samuel Library, and so to College Street. A few hundred feet further south it reached the Caer Howell, unofficial student centre of the 1860s, where a man could recover from bookwork with sausages and pork pie, drink lager beer, smoke cigars, throw dice for more drinks, sing, and dance jigs and reels until the College curfew threatened. The Taddle circled the tavern's bowling green and continued south, past the site of the 1852 Provincial Fair, forerunner of the CNE. It crossed University Avenue just south of the modern Hospital for Sick Children (the site also of Mary Pickford's childhood home) and disappeared underground.

Go back in time before the University of Toronto, before the city's sewers. The Taddle purls onward, east and south, skirting the Macaulay property where Holy Trinity Church will rise. It crosses Yonge Street near Shuter, passes the future site of Massey Hall, and zigzags eastwardly. Its ravine is big enough to interrupt Queen Street.

At Moss Park our stream is joined by another, flowing south from the open land where the Normal School and later Ryerson Polytechnical Institute will rise. Then, in sweeping curve, it rushes to the bay at the foot of Parliament Street. A narrow wooden bridge spans the ten-foot gully; has broached in the lakebank. On a visit in 1793, Lieutenant James Givins is reputed to have paddled up this stream under the impression he was exploring the Don.

And here, along the bay and nestled in the Taddle's curve, John Graves Simcoe laid out the first eight blocks of homes and shops for his capital of York. At the creek mouth he ordered built the first parliament buildings of Upper Canada, opened in 1797 and burned by an American war party in 1813. Pioneer scullery maids and volunteer firefighters drew water from the creek. On its grassy bank York held its earliest fairs. And nearby, behind the legislative chambers, the Clerk of the Crown, John Small shot and killed the Attorney General of Upper Canada, John White, in a duel over the reputation of the former's wife. It was some years before Mrs. Small again was welcome in polite society.

The naming of the Taddle is obscure. One theory links with the Tattle family of Toronto; but the old Tatt homestead, at St. Clair and Avenue Road, is on the other side of a watershed. Others have it that the name comes from tadpoles that inhabited the water; or that it is onomatopoeic recalling the sound of water over stones: W.G. Cool (Trinity 6T8) points out that *tattle* is an English north country dialect variant of *toddle*, which in the past could mean "to move with a gentle sound, as a stream or river". In any case the name was used only in the area of the campus and even there the official designation was University Creek.

The source of the stream also is uncertain. Members of the University community who live in Wychwood Park

atop the Davenport hill west of Bathurst Street, claim with some probability that they are close to the headwaters, but the pond in their little enclave is fed from a stream that rises further to the north. Where, no one seems to know. It is a small jump, however, from the stream that empties the Wychwood pond, which still today runs briefly in the sunshine before dropping into the sewer system, to the neighbourhood of St. Alban's Church in the west Annex of Toronto, the farthest back I have been able to trace the Taddle on 19th century maps. From there it flowed southeasterly to cross St. George Street a block and a half above Bloor.

Mrs. H.J. Cody, widow of a former president and chancellor of the University, knew it as a small stream in the 1890s, quite lost to sight in the green fields and market gardens west of St. George. To the east of that thoroughfare the Taddle passed behind her childhood home. The cedar block pavement was raised at the intersection of Prince Arthur and Bedford Road to let the water through; a pool gathered in the spring, large enough to float small rafts. (A new public park at that corner has been named in memory of the Taddle.)

A little further and the stream turned sharply south, ready to cross under Bloor. At the curve John Shaw, mayor of Toronto from 1897 to 1899, had a pleasant gabled cottage with a fine garden running down the gullyside. Across the gully, by Avenue Road, stood the Nordheimer mansion, a civic showplace. But some people remembered the site for the Tecumseh Wigwam, a resort somewhat less respectable than the Caer Howell, frequented by young bloods of Yorkville.

*John Margetson, he lives here  
He sells brandy, wine and beer*

its sign announced. The Wigwam was torn down in 1874; the mansion in due course also disappeared; another hostelry rose. The builders of the Park Plaza are said to have had difficulty finding firm footings around the old creek bed, but they persevered, and eventually other generations of undergraduates found themselves following the Taddle in search of liquid comfort.

The creek's real fame lies in only a few hundred feet of its course—those close to the centre of the campus. Here, on its eastern side, was built in 1842 King's College, predecessor of the University of Toronto, on the site of the present parliament buildings. And here, on the other side, rose the nucleus of the University, the main building, now University College, completed in the autumn of 1859.

A dam was constructed where a road now enters the campus from Queen's Park Crescent, and the miniature lake thus formed stretched to the present site of Wycliffe College. A freshman arriving in the 1860s found "a beautiful pond, closed in with forest trees, the eastern edge blue with some curious water flowers; and at the upper end of the still blue surface, a number of wild ducks were swimming about . . . Away down the valley below this pond, a little stream, into which the overflow of the pond emptied, meandered through clumps of bulrushes and willow trees: a little wooden sidewalk descended into this valley from the west and rose again in the distance: the hills on either side were clothed with evergreens, pine and hemlock, spruce and balsam, and crimson maple trees." (The quotation comes from *The Golden Age*, volume 5 of *Studies of Student Life* written by Professor W.J. Loudon.)

In those simpler days it was not unknown for undergraduates to spend spare moments beside the pond picking wildflowers and chasing butterflies. Some caught chub and shiners and the occasional speckled trout in its water. In winter the pond made a natural skating rink and the slopes beside it were popular for tobogganing. In spring young lovers found it a romantic rendezvous, and in summer families watched while youngsters sailed toy boats on its surface. At least one student prankster made use of it—to hide the College lawn mower under several feet of water, where it remained until the pond was drained years later.

But in the autumn the Taddle had a very different reputation, particularly for those freshmen who lacked respect for their elders of the second year. Dragged first to the hazing stone in the University College quadrangle ("Hic jacet corpus tironis" was traced upon it: "Here lies the body of a freshman"), then down to the basement to stand trial, the offender was swiftly taught his errors. For those who would not recant, the Taddle waited—no joke on a chill November evening. In 1882 the water failed to cool one freshman's ardour. He complained, and in the row that followed the practice of dunking came to a forced end.

One who loved the Taddle was John McCaul, first president (1850-80) of the University of Toronto. The pond was named in his honour and it was his pleasure to walk along its shore with colleagues and visitors. "Long after I am dead," he would remark, "and after my scholarship is forgotten" (he was a classicist) "my name will live in this pond." Poor man: Taddle Creek and McCaul's Pond were buried two years before he was.

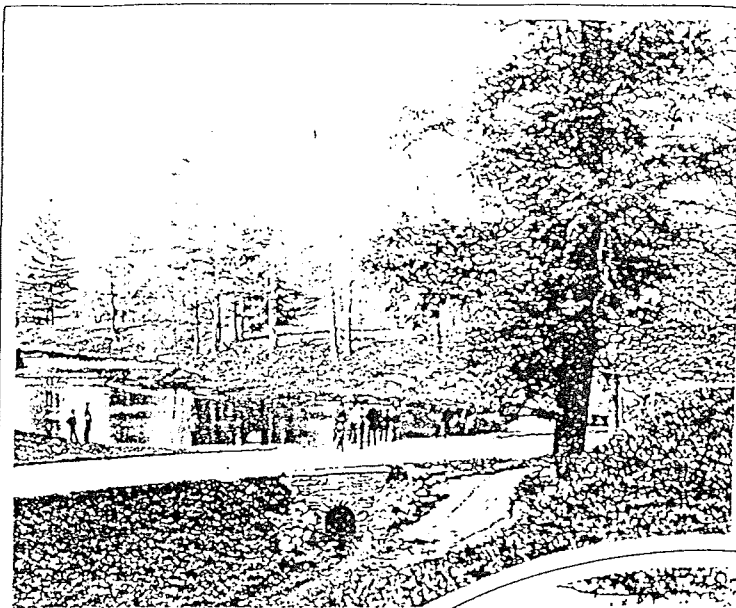
The reason, even then, was—pollution. Yorkville, growing upstream from the campus, dumped its waste in drains opening onto the stream. Townsfolk used the pond for the execution and disposal of unwanted pets. The Taddle was no longer fresh.

Its plight provided *The Varsity* with an early political campaign. One of the briefest pronouncements appeared on Nov. 4, 1881: "The stench arising from the Taddle is very pronounced. The prevalence of so much fever in the city is surely a good reason for the prompt abatement of this longstanding nuisance." The University agreed. The Taddle was an open sewer: it was up to the city to close it.

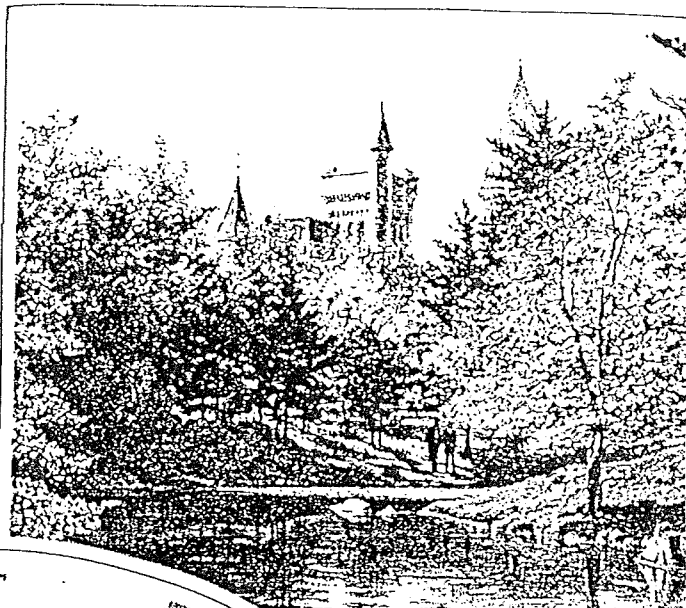
Fortunately, the University had clout. It owned a great deal of land and it refused to allow more streets to be opened within its boundaries until something was done. In May 1884 tenders were called; the contract to enclose the Taddle in a sewer was let to A.J. Brown for \$15,495. With victory in sight, *The Varsity* could afford to express regrets in a blessedly anonymous example of Victorian undergraduate sentiment (see box).

So the Taddle was buried, but still it is with us. The men and women who work in Hart House will tell you it gurgles beneath the squash courts and the camera clubrooms. Householders in the Annex talk of flooded basements; the builders of the Medical Sciences Building and the Hospital for Sick Children have had to contend with its vagaries.

And on a clear day, when the sun is high, if you peer down a grating in the lawn in front of Hart House, you can still see the old stream flowing. On such a day, when professors are locked inside their offices writing books and students are in the libraries reading them when they could be picking wildflowers and chasing butterflies, it isn't hard to imagine that, deep underground, the imprisoned Taddle chuckles.



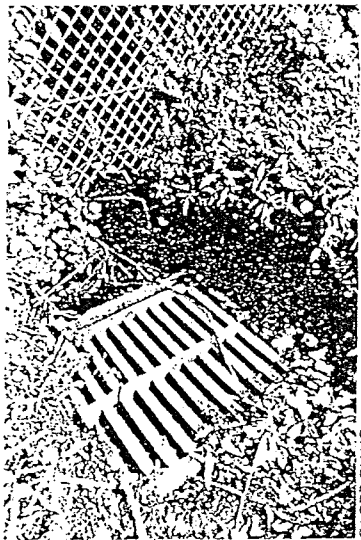
The miniature lake



Lucius O'Brien's persp.

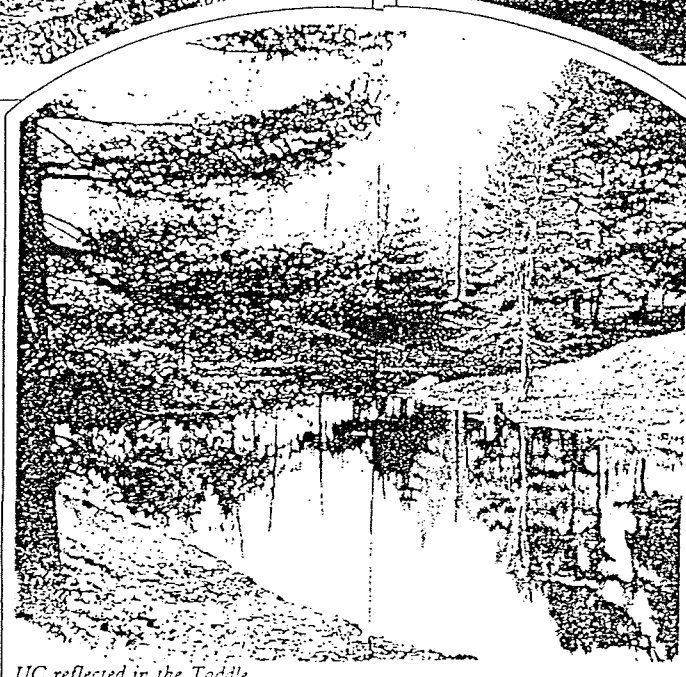
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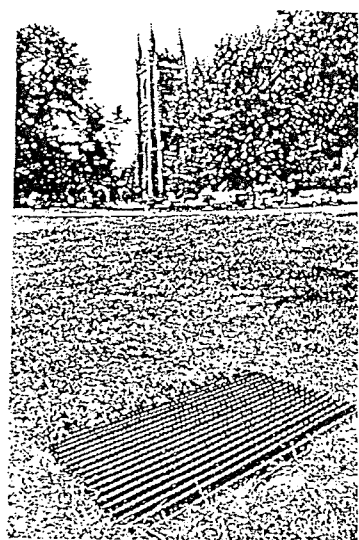


At Davenport Road

DAVID LLOYD



UC reflected in the Taddle



At Hart House Circle

O, gentle Taddle! wandering by thy side,  
I watch thy merry waters glide,  
And hear the murmur of thy limpid tide,  
Taddle.

Of undergraduates full many a race  
Here by thy banks have dwelt a little space,  
And known and loved this mem'ry haunted place,  
Taddle.

And often have thy banks and bosky glades  
Resounded to the laugh of youths and maid's  
As careless, happy, free, they sported near thy shades,  
Taddle.

Here many a deed of blood and derring-do  
Has bearded Senior or relentless Soph put through,  
And stained with Freshman green thy waters blue,  
Taddle.

But sentimental fancies, deeds of gore,  
Shall twine around thy sacred name no more.  
Thy days are ended, and thy glories o'er,  
Taddle.

The City Council would thy stream immure,  
And shut thee up with bricks and lime secure,  
And make thee — Ichabod! — a common sewer,  
Taddle.

Let's soothe thy parting spirit with a Freshman's blood,  
And while there's time, imbed him deep in mud,  
And sail him tenderly down thy flood,  
Taddle, O, Taddle.

— The Varsity, October 6, 1883