

Is Your Great-Grandfather in this 1907 Photograph from East Toronto?

By Bruce McCowan and Barbara Myrvold



The Hunter's Return York 1907

Courtesy Bruce McCowan

Back Row: ? ; ? ; ? ; George Empringham Senior; ? ; ? ; George Walters

Middle Row: William (Bill) McCowan; ? ; Robert (Bob) McCowan; ? ; ? ; Alexander McCowan; Ross Walters

Front Row: William R. Walters; ? ; William Chester; Archibald Paterson; ? ; George Chester; Harold McCowan

If you can identify anyone else in this photograph, please email TBETHS
contactTBETHS@gmail.com or Bruce McCowan, bmccowan@netrover.com

In March 2025, Bruce McCowan, a Scarborough historian, contacted TBETHS asking if we could assist him in identifying individuals shown in a photograph titled “The Hunter’s Return York 1907”. (Bruce already had named eight of the 22 people.) The image showed 21 men, one boy and five dogs posed in front of a kill of a dozen deer.

Another picture of the event, supplied by Bruce along with Ann Menheere (who recognized her great-great grandfather, great grandfather and great uncle Walters in the photo) documented that the group was in front of Abbott’s Meat Market, a butcher shop then operated by Frank B. (Baker) Abbott (1862-1939) and located on the north side of Danforth Avenue west of Dawes Road. (That area was known as “Little York” hence “York” was used in the title of the other image.)



**Another view of *The Hunter’s Return York 1907*
showing Abbott’s Meat Market, Danforth Avenue, north side, west of Dawes
Road, 1907**

Courtesy Bruce McCowan and Ann Menheere

Further research indicated that the group was associated with the East Toronto Gun Club, which was established in the 1890s. Most of its activities revolved around shooting matches held in the local area, notably at the [Newmarket Race Track](#) north of Danforth west of Main (where the club erected a shooting shanty and a gallery in 1898) and later near the Empringham Hotel, southwest corner of Danforth and Dawes Road. (George Empringham Senior and Junior both were club members.)

For several years in the early 1900s, the club also offered an annual deer hunt, conducted in the autumn from its camp (equipped with a cabin and several boats) at Boundary and Spring Lake, near South River, Ontario, about 240 km from East Toronto. The hunting party boasted it had “bagged 33 deer and a wolf” in 1902 and “33 fine deer. Many rabbits and partridge” in 1904.

It appears that the East Toronto Gun Club ceased operations shortly after the hunting pictures were taken. Other gun clubs existed in the local area around this time, notably the Balmy Beach Gun Club, which started in 1903 and operated on its own until 1924 when it amalgamated with another club.

More about the people identified in the picture so far

Back Row



George Empringham, Senior, 1837-1915. Operated the Empringham Hotel, Danforth Avenue, southeast corner of Dawes Road from the 1880s until his retirement a few years before his death.



George Walters, 1834-1919. Born in England, he came to Canada in 1857, and became a blacksmith and a carriage maker in Whitby Township. He moved to East Toronto about 1904, and lived with his son, Dr. W. R. Walters, and his family at Danforth and Main.

Middle Row



William (Bill) McCowan, 1862-1921. The youngest of seven children of Robert McCowan and Jane Underwood, Bill McCowan was also an avid curler. He inherited one of his father's farms in Scarborough.



Robert (Bob) McCowan, 1855-1931. Brother of Bill McCowan, Bob farmed on lot 22 concessions B and C in Scarborough (at McCowan and Kingston Roads) and was well-known for his prize-winning grain. He was the reeve of Scarborough Township 1923 to 1925.



Alexander McCowan, 1853-1939. First cousin of Bob and Bill McCowan, Alex retired from farming in Scarborough in 1905, and moved to 20 Lyall Avenue, East

Toronto, where he lived until his death. Alex was the local (Conservative) Member of the Provincial Legislature 1905-1913 and then Sherriff of York County for over 20 years.



(William) Ross Walters, 1901-1971. Then about six years old, Ross was the youngest of five children of Dr. W. R. Walters and wife. Like his father, Ross became a physician, and was the medical superintendent at the Salvation Army's Grace Hospital in Toronto for many years. He and his family lived on Glen Manor Drive in the Beach neighbourhood.

Front Row



Dr. W. R. (William Rundle) Walters, 1862-1930. East Toronto physician and surgeon from the late 1880s until his death. He was involved in many community activities, notably as the municipality of East Toronto's reeve twice and its mayor three times. He was chair of the Toronto Board of Education in 1930. His home and office were on Danforth Avenue at the northeast corner of Main Street.



William Chester, 1860-1934. Youngest brother of George Chester.



Archibald (Arch) Paterson, 1859-1951. Farmed in Scarborough, where his family were early settlers. Married to Mary Chester, the youngest sister of George and William Chester. An avid curler, he participated in the sport for 70 years until age 86. Arch and Bob McCowan often skipped together in the double-rink format in the Ontario Tankard curling bonspiel.



George Chester, 1850-1937. Farmer in Scarborough. Married to Kate McCowan, oldest sister of Bob and Bill McCowan. George often curled on the Bob McCowan rink in various bonspiels.



Harold McCowan, 1888-1964. Youngest son of Robert (Bob) McCowan and Hannah Ashbridge. He was an excellent curler along with his brother, Ashley (also a deer hunter). Harold's farmhouse in Scarborough displayed several stuffed hunting trophies including several birds and two deer heads.

Sources Consulted

"East Toronto Gun Club" was searched in several online databases, namely [Canadiana](#) (42 hits), [TBETHS Local History Index](#) (18 hits), Globe and Mail (8 hits); and Toronto Star (2 hits). The latter two databases are available through the Toronto Public Library.

<https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/history-genealogy/>. These sources, along with Ancestry.ca and newspapers.com, also were consulted for biographical information about the people in the two pictures.