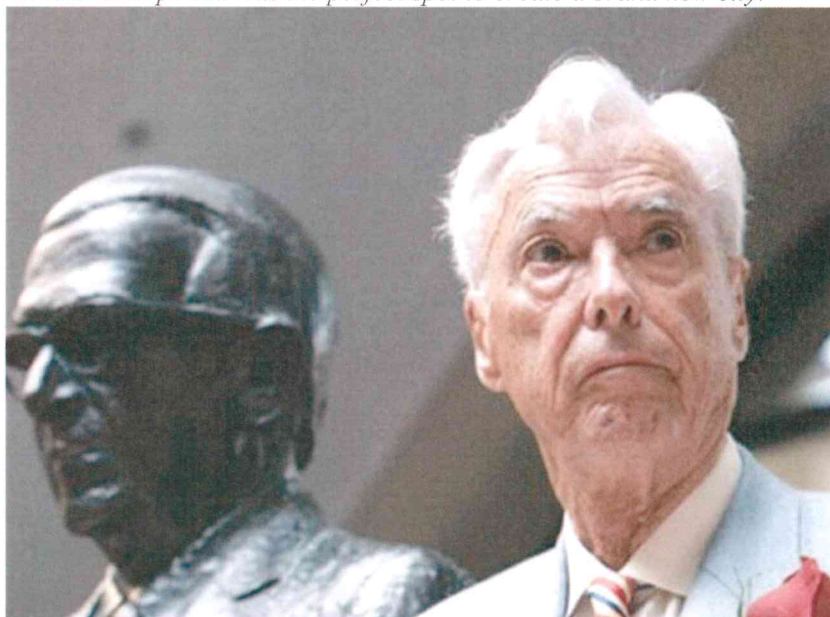


# City's future framed by iconic builders

by [Rick Drennan](#) Mississauga News, Oct 10, 2014



*Bruce McLaughlin was one of the visionaries who in the 1950s believed that the corner of Highway 10 and Burnhamthorpe Rd. was the perfect spot to create a brand new city.*



*It was an emotional moment for Harold Shipp at the 2006 Civic Awards as a statue of his late father, Gordon S. Shipp, was unveiled during the ceremony. Photo by Derek Woollam. May 25/06*

MISSISSAUGA — Mention the name Bruce McLaughlin to a few citizens of Mississauga and you'll probably get a few different responses: blank stares ("Bruce who?"); knowing smiles ("Ah, yes, Bruce: What a visionary,"); and furrowed brows ("That so-and-so ruined this city").

What you won't get is an argument about who was the man who conceived modern-day Mississauga.

And yes, it was a man – not outgoing mayor Hazel McCallion.

The late Mr. McLaughlin was a lawyer-turned-developer, turned author-visionary who believed, back in the late 1950s, that an empty field at the corner of Highway 10 and Burnhamthorpe Rd. was the perfect spot to create a brand new city – a shining example of how planning, public and private-sector partnerships, a little futuristic thinking and lots of hard work, could turn Toronto Township – then a collection of disparate communities – into a mega-metropolis, a utopian urban landscape.

It would be different from anything else in North America.

A pretty ambitious project, don'tcha think? But certainly in keeping with McLaughlin's enormous appetite for a challenge, and his mega-ambition.

He also sported a nice sized ego.

Build it, said our man Bruce, and they will come – citizens, shoppers, politicians and the private sector.

In a way (but only in a way), he was right. Square One became a magnet for shoppers and a city landmark. City Hall was built next door. Corporations fell into line, moving into the gleaming new office towers on City Centre Dr.

Today, Celebration Square is a draw for all, and the square is surrounded by a forest of high-end condos.

But it isn't exactly how McLaughlin envisioned it – not even close, actually.

He wanted tighter streets, and walkways over Burnhamthorpe Rd.

He wanted to create the leafy feel of a city core.

Today, McLaughlin is a forgotten figure, his name emblazoned on one of the major north-south roads in the city, but that is almost the last reminder of him – just one of the many men (yes, all men) who put concrete and mortar and glass and steel together and helped create a city.

Ah, yes, Mississauga's builders – now brought into sharper focus as the city celebrates its 40th anniversary this year.

In many ways, it all began with Mississauga's very own Macklin Hancock. He was in his 20s when he was hired to design Don Mills, Canada's first corporate suburb, in 1952.

The former Second World War fighter pilot had just graduated from the Harvard School of Design when he got the plum assignment, and along with a team of architects, designed a 'new town' concept that became the standard for post-war suburban development throughout North America.

Hancock's privately built and planned 'new towns' were designed to be places where people lived, shopped and worked that would allow families to limit themselves to one vehicle. The towns were composed of interconnected neighbourhoods where pedestrian paths and parks encouraged people to get out of cars and walk to schools, churches and town centres. Buildings were modern, and housing ranged from detached single family houses to low-rise apartments and townhouses.

Born in China in 1925, Hancock grew up in Mississauga. His father-in-law, Karl Fraser, was the president of Don Mills Development Company, a firm that held 2,000 acres at Don Mills Rd. and Lawrence Ave. where the new planned community would be built. Don Mills would become the envy of urban planners around the planet.

Hancock was a visionary, raised with a love of horticulture and the environment. He dedicated his life to living with beauty in an urban setting.

The former head of the Ontario Association of Landscape Architects and Canadian Institute of Planners would eventually lend his skills to design two major 'new towns' in Mississauga in the 1970s: Meadowvale and Erin Mills. People came from as far away as Australia to see these modern-day marvels. The Meadowvale development took up 11,000 acres of fields and was designed to house 70,000 people. Hancock designed Lake Aquitaine as a recreation area. The cost of creating the lake was \$2 million.



Despite his role in defining our city and revolutionizing urban planning, he, like McLaughlin remains virtually unknown in his hometown.

Before Hancock there was Thomas Groves who founded Groves Construction and built houses in Lakeview in the years following the First World War, as well as many industrial and commercial buildings in Mississauga. Local historian Kathleen Hicks, says Groves was innovative when it came to design and building, and created the 'Groves Estimating Rule' so builders could estimate supplies needed to build a structure. He was the first self-taught architect to design commercial buildings with elongated windows to increase natural light.

By the early 1950s, Gordon Shipp and his son Harold eyed up building a new upscale neighbourhood west of Dixie Rd. and south of the QEW. The Toronto-based Shipp Corp. cut its teeth building houses in Toronto, but when they paid \$40,000 for 23 acres in Toronto Township in January 1951, a lot of people thought they were crazy. Who would ever want to live west of Dixie Rd?

As it turned out, quite a few.

The tract was unzoned, raw agricultural land that had been planted in apple orchards, and Harold Shipp, the recently deceased chairman and CEO of Shipp Corporation Ltd., said getting it rezoned "took an ungodly amount of time!"

It was two months before Toronto Township rezoned the land for residential. Harold Shipp remembered hand-carrying plans into the township's one-man planning department before noon to get building permits inked that afternoon. Now it commonly takes a year to get a permit.

When the Shipp's built on the north side of the QEW in the spring of 1952, they set up what seemed like a carnival with a PA system, a big tent and 10 of their own salespeople. It paid off: they sold an unheard of 126 homes in 10 days, and over 800 in all.

The Shipp's built 853 houses in Applewood Acres, and went on to build houses, apartments and commercial buildings throughout the city. The company even begat another: Kaneff Corp., another great Mississauga builder. (See story page 10).

The great builders probably never envisioned Mississauga becoming Canada's sixth largest city. But the post-war housing shortage made it pre-ordained for growth, allowing

men like Hancock, McLaughlin, the Shipps, and Kaneff to come along with the bricks and mortar.

Many might not even know them anymore, but they are a part of Mississauga's DNA and their legacy will live on for years to come.

by [Rick Drennan](#)

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