

Section 2: Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital Farm / Beekeeping

Follow the sidewalk down Colonel Samuel Smith Drive until you reach the crosswalk. Once there, start the audio and continue on this looped path until you reach Colonel Samuel Smith Drive again

Let's make our way to the Lakeshore Campus main cottage buildings, which were the original buildings from the Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital that operated here from 1890 to 1979. During its history, the hospital operated two separate farms. One was located here at Lakeshore Grounds, where relics of an apple orchard remain today. The other farm was situated north of the main site, near where the Gardiner Expressway is today. Patients worked alongside paid staff to raise animals, including chickens, ducks, cattle, and horses, and grow crops such as legumes, vegetables, and fruits. The goal was for the institution to be as self-sufficient as possible in producing its own food.

Established in 1890, the hospital grounds included cottages, gardens, and large areas dedicated to agriculture. This setup reflected the belief in the therapeutic benefits of fresh air, physical activity, and productive labor. Patients engaged in agricultural work, with women primarily handling indoor tasks and men working outdoors.

The philosophy behind this was multifaceted. First, it was believed that the structured routine and physical labor could help restore a sense of normalcy and purpose to the patients' lives. Additionally, the hospital was largely self-sufficient, with the produce grown on the grounds helping to feed the patients and staff. This not only reduced costs but also fostered a sense of community and shared effort.

However, it's important to recognize the complexities and ethical issues associated with this form of therapy. While the agricultural work provided structure and a sense of purpose, it was also unpaid labor. The men who worked the fields and gardens did so without compensation, which raises significant ethical concerns about the exploitation of vulnerable individuals. The patients were, in many ways, an unseen and unacknowledged workforce, contributing significantly to the hospital's operation without any formal recognition or reward.

The impact on patients varied. Some expressed a sense of pride and accomplishment in their work:

“We go to the garden when we are depressed or in need of inspiration.”

Another patient described the beauty and abundance they helped create: “You should see the sea of cabbages.”

However, the end of the agriculture program in the 1950s left many feeling a deep sense of loss:

“The gardens have been taken away from us. We can't work in them anymore... something about cheap labor.”

It's crucial to remember and honor the contributions of the patients. The apple orchard remains a living testament to their work, providing a foundation for the hospital's operation for many years. At the same time we must acknowledge the complexities and injustices they faced, emphasizing the need for ethical treatment and fair compensation for all workers.

If you're interested in learning more about the hospital's history, the Lakeshore Grounds Interpretive Centre offers a free tour that includes access to the underground tunnels, which were also constructed through patient labor.

Beekeeping

Let's shift our focus slightly to some of the sustainable agriculture projects happening here on campus. While agriculture is still alive and well here, it does, of course, operate on a smaller scale than it did during the hospital days.

Did you know that under the initiative of Humber sustainability, Humber College is a certified bee campus? Besides providing pollinator habitat for many species of native bees, the college is also a safe haven for a small number of rescue honeybee swarms. My name is Fran Freeman. With my partner John, I care for the hives at both campuses of Humber College and at the Humber Arboretum and teach sustainable urban beekeeping. We also rescue honeybee swarms. One of the hives at Humber Lakeshore has a thriving colony of honeybees, rescued last year from a backyard tree in Etobicoke. The bees were so gentle that I was able to put them into a box with my bare hands.

Another hive began as bees that have inhabited a house chimney in Mimico for over 20 years. Earlier this summer they swarmed and landed on a nearby lilac tree. But the swarm was so large and so heavy that the branch broke and the bees fell to the ground. Night was approaching and rain was forecast so we had to work quickly to bring them to the safety of the Humber Lakeshore bee yard where they are currently doing very well.

The Lakeshore bee yard is situated on the second floor walkout of L Building within view of the cafeteria to help people make the connection between the food they are eating and the essential role of bees in pollination. Native bees and honeybees are keystone species in the ecosystem. Our focus is on raising healthy and resilient bees, not so much on honey production. Though, if the bees have surplus, honey is a nice bonus.

For those interested in learning more, the Humber Arboretum offers a variety of bee-related courses throughout the year, including bee yard workshops, hive product harvesting, and product making like mead and beeswax candles. These courses are usually hybrid, combining online theory with in-person hands-on sessions.