



RUSHOLME

George Taylor Denison II

George Taylor Denison II, born in 1816, was the second son of George Taylor Denison of Bellevue. After attending Upper Canada College, he studied law and became a prominent lawyer, although he retired from practice in 1856 to become an entrepreneur. George also succeeded his father and brother in command of the Governor General's Body Guard. Through the years, he rubbed elbows with an international elite that included princes, governors general, and ministers.

At twenty-one years of age, George was made a lieutenant with the Queen's Light Dragoons, and he moved up through the ranks to lieutenant colonel by 1853. In 1860, after commanding the First Regiment of the York Light Dragoons, he was made a full colonel. In addition to his interest in matters military, according to Paul Gagan in *The Denison Family of Toronto*, he also "retained his grandfather's attachment to the soil, lavishing care and time on the fields and orchards of Rusholme which became a model of productive, scientific farming."

In 1838, George Denison II married Mary Anne Dewson, and the following year he built his home on the part of park lot 27 given to him by his father. He named it after the park-like property of a Manchester relative, Joseph Denison. White gates and a gabled gatekeeper's cottage marked the entrance to the curving carriage drive from the corner of modern Dundas and Rusholme Streets.

George's division of his family's landholdings had a major influence on the development of west Toronto. The Denisons lived the life of country squires, with their mansions protected by forests and fields, even as they subdivided nearby land and reaped sizeable profits. During the 1850s, as property values rose and park lot property could command as much as £200 an acre, George II sold some of the land north of Dundas.

Rusholme was at the centre of a cosmopolitan social life. The house was the scene of elaborate soirées and balls, and the daughters were presented at court. As a Confederate sympathizer, George was

visited at Rusholme by General Robert E. Lee. He was also visited by a number of other royal and military personalities. Mary Anne's brother, George Dewson, was actually a colonel in the Confederate Army. The house was filled with military trophies and family portraits. On special occasions, the Denison coach — emblazoned with the family crest and attended by liveried coachmen — would sweep out the drive.

George Taylor Denison II died in 1873. The house went to his widow, but already two-thirds of the property had been sold off. Rusholme Road was subdivided in 1883 and, by 1884, the property surrounding the house had been reduced to a square bounded by Dovercourt Road, St. Anne's Road, Rusholme Street, and College Street.

Although George and his wife had seven sons, the second son, Frederick, inherited the house. The eldest son, George Taylor Denison III, was already living in his own home at Heydon Villa by that time. Frederick added a ballroom and a library at Rusholme. The twenty-one rooms were eventually filled with his eight children.

Frederick Denison followed in the military tradition of the Denison family. He was famous for an unusual expedition in 1884. With a group of Canadian voyageurs, he accompanied the Wolseley expedition up the Nile to rescue General Charles Gordon, who was under siege at Khartoum. After a gruelling ordeal, the unlikely group discovered that Khartoum had fallen and that Gordon had been beheaded.

Frederick's wife stayed on at Rusholme after his death in 1896. Interestingly, Rusholme was one of the last homes in Toronto to convert to electricity; it had gas lighting long into the electric age. When his son inherited the property, the house was run down. Increasing taxes and the cost of maintaining household staff had contributed to its deterioration. After he died in 1953, his widow sold the property, and the house was demolished to make way for apartments.



Rusholme in 1895, while it was occupied by Frederick Charles Denison, the son of George Taylor II. Frederick was part of the ill-starred expedition to rescue General Gordon at Khartoum in 1884–85. MTRL T11194

Rusholme was home to a dynasty. For 115 years it had been occupied by a single family noted for its involvement in the development of the city. Its men had seen service in every war in

which Canada had played a part. The following street names preserve the neighbourhood's Denison roots: Rusholme Park Crescent, Rusholme Road, Rusholme Drive, and Dewson Street.