

A Social History of # 27 Goulburn Avenue Ottawa Ontario

***By Marc S. Lowell and David LaFranchise
November 2014***



Goulburn Avenue is a unique house associated with many prominent individuals from Ottawa's past, reflecting its growth from a frontier lumber village to a factory town, a centre of government and a modern travel destination for business and pleasure.

When he died in 1835, Lieutenant-Colonel John By, builder of the Rideau Canal and founder of Ottawa, left his heirs in England most of the land under Centretown and Lower Sandy Hill. In 1875 the By family sold the property, still mostly undeveloped, to the Ottawa Freehold Association, a partnership of lumberman James MacLaren, mill owner Robert Blackburn and Charles Magee of the Bank of Ottawa.

The new owners quickly surveyed the land, laid out new streets, including Goulbourn and Marlborough, named for townships where the partners had rural landholdings, and put their new city lots on the market. But initially they had no more success than the By family, and most of the land remained leased to farmers as pasture or market gardens.

In 1890 William and Caroline Davis bought lots 4 and 5 on the east side of Goulbourn, adding lot 6 in 1900. Born in Ireland in 1851, William Henry Davis was brought to Ottawa as a young child. With his two brothers he set up as a contractor for heavy construction across Canada, and together they built canals, docks, railways and bridges, including the Quebec Bridge.

An active alumnus of the College of Ottawa (when this was the privilege of a tiny minority), Davis and his wife moved in the highest circles in Ottawa, taking tea with Lady Macdonald, dancing at Government House, summering at Kennebunkport, Maine or down the Saint Lawrence, and lived at Cresthill, their house at 404 Theodore Street (today the site of the Strathcona Apartments on Laurier Avenue East), surrounded by a renowned collection of modern painting (sometimes loaned to the National Gallery). A touch of the backwoods remained, however: his neighbours complained that Davis piled his garbage on his front lawn, and in 1894 Davis was convicted of assault with gross bodily harm after he attacked a debtor.

About 1902, Davis built no 25 and no 27 Goulbourn on his three lots. William Topley, son of the pioneering Ottawa photographer, rented no 25 in 1902 and bought it outright in 1905 for \$6,750. Hector Charmanne, a Belgian diplomat and Consul-General for Belgium, was the first resident of No 27, renting it from 1903 to 1907.

It is not known who designed the house, or whether it was planned with this unique appearance in mind, or simply as a fashionable Arts and Crafts style house that took on its current appearance, notably the rock-faced stone finish, through later renovations. Certainly the stone wall around the property seems to date from after 1913, when the second of two extensions of the property took place.

Davis died unexpectedly in 1905, leaving an estate of \$105,000. In 1907 Lieutenant-Colonel Sir François Gourdeau, Deputy-Minister of Fisheries, bought no 27 for \$10,500, and also extended the lot 25 ft south, paying the owner of lot 7 \$600 for half of her property. Gourdeau sold the house in 1913 to Noulan Cauchon for \$16,500. Cauchon made the last extension to the property, buying 37 Goulbourn and the remaining part of lot 7 for \$3,400.

Noulan Cauchon was born in Winnipeg, the son of Joseph Cauchon, politician, journalist and the first Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba. Noulan started his career as a railway engineer, but in consulting on projects for cities across the country, he became increasingly interested in issues around conservation, (what we today would call sustainability) and promoted transportation and

land-use planning as necessary responses to the congestion, filth, disease and ugliness associated with rapid urban growth.

From 1921 until his death in 1935, Cauchon served as chair of the City of Ottawa's Town Planning Commission. Here he waged a largely fruitless campaign for a road network, a Federal District and land-use planning against indifferent municipalities and a hostile Federal Government. He is best known for originating many ideas that later became commonplace: zoning, industrial parks, rapid transit corridors, expressways, and construction of the Queensway. He is honoured today as one of the founders of town planning in Canada.

Most of this lay in the future when Cauchon sold 27 Goulbourn in 1919 to Vimy Realty, a company controlled by the Belcourt family, for \$15,000.

The new owner and resident was Senator Napoléon Belcourt, native of Lower Town, lawyer, MP for the City from 1896-1908, characterized during the strife over Regulation 17 as "perhaps the most distinguished of French Canadians in Ontario". After Belcourt's death in 1933 the house sat vacant for almost two years before being rented to Cabrera A Munoz, Consul-General of Argentina (1935-1937), Walter Jones, President of IBM Canada (1938) and finally to Major-General WH Elkins in 1939-1940

Elkins (1883-1964) graduated from the Royal Military College in 1905 to join Battery B of the Royal Canadian Artillery, one half of Canada's new standing military force. After service in India and on the Western Front in World War I, he commanded a number of bases before moving to Ottawa to serve as Master-General of the Ordnance, responsible for all artillery for the Canadian Army, a post he held for most of World War II.

Starting with the War, 27 Goulbourn served for some sixty years as office space. The Belcourts rented the building in 1941 to Canadian Legion War Services, an organization that provided social services to military personnel. The Legion eventually bought the building (1944) paying \$16,000, but sold it in 1947 to the Canadian Lumbermen's Association, who used it to house associated industry and lobby groups like the White Pine Bureau and the Canadian Tree Bark Association. In later years, offices were rented to a wider range of groups, including the National Capital Region of the Sommeliers' Guild and the Hand-held Photography Association. From 1951-1956 and again from 2002-2005 parts of the building were also rented as apartments.

In 2006 Glen Hartle bought the building and launched an extensive interior renovation to open it as TwentySeven, a short-term residence with seven suites, each named for a previous resident, as well as common areas, storage space and an apartment for the owners.

In 2007 the City conducted a building-by-building review of Sandy Hill to identify additional buildings worthy of heritage status. 27 Goulbourn was given a high rating (75/100) because of its age, unique architecture, historical associations and landmark status. The Sandy Hill Heritage Study is now in circulation in draft form, but currently the house does not have any heritage designation.

Sources: City Of Ottawa Street Directories
Land Registry Office Of Ontario