

27 Sweetland final

In 1831, with the Rideau Canal almost finished, Lt-Col John By bought the land bounded by today's Bronson, Laurier, Gladstone and Mann Avenues and the Rideau River, in the path of growth of Bytown, as he thought. However, the new town grew in other directions, and his heirs rented out their property to farmers and market gardeners.

It wasn't until the provincial government moved from Quebec City in October 1865 that prospects began to look up for Sandy Hill and the eastern part of the By Estate. Although the entire civil service numbered only 350 people, they were used to a better life than the primitive conditions of Ottawa: dirty, reeking and poorly drained (no water or sewers), full of wandering pigs and cattle "a wilderness of wooden shanties spread along either side of long, broad strips of mud".

Looking for a better neighbourhood, the newcomers bought lots on the Besserer Estate (east of today's Waller St between Rideau and Laurier) and built comfortable houses. Others saw opportunity for the By Estate as well, and in 1876 the Freehold Association of Ottawa, a partnership of James Maclaren, Charles Magee and Robert Blackburn, bought the By Estate, surveyed the present streets, and began to market lots more aggressively. West of King St (today's King Edward Ave.) the Association extended the existing street grid south; east of King, they laid out a new grid of north/south streets, naming them after local worthies, including Dr. John Sweetland, sheriff of Carleton County.

Late on the market, the By Estate did not enjoy the same cachet as the Besserer lands, but its developers promoted it as a respectable neighbourhood of modest houses for merchants, civil servants and clerical workers. In line with this thinking, John Hunter Parnell bought lots 4 and 5 on the east side of Sweetland Ave. in 1885, paying \$1,400. As the usual price of a lot was \$100, this suggests that there were already one or more buildings on the land. On lot 4, Parnell built a pair of semi-detached houses (19 and 21 Sweetland) and on lot 5, two identical (but reversed) singles (27 and 29 Sweetland). No. 29 was sold in 1896 for \$1700, but Parnell kept the others as rental properties.

No 27 is first recorded in 1888, a two and half storey brick house with a separate woodshed, rented to Arthur Monk, a clerk at the Bank of Montreal on Wellington St. Monk left in 1893, to be replaced by George Pope (1893-1898), a clerk in the Department of the Interior, and a relative of Sir Joseph Pope, long-time private secretary to Sir John A Macdonald. George himself returned to P.E.I. and sat in the provincial legislature. A series of short-term tenants, civil servants, traveling salesmen, painters, millwrights, followed.

Parnell died in 1905, leaving no. 27 to John P Featherston, druggist and mayor of Ottawa in 1874 and 1875, and his wife Elizabeth, along with a 6.42 foot strip of lot 4 – the strip of land has been associated with no. 27 ever since. The Featherstons continued to rent out the house until John died in 1921, at which point Elizabeth lived in the house until her death in 1927. Elizabeth's executor, her neighbour Kathleen Merrick of 19 Sweetland, sold no 27 in 1929 to John E Vallillee, a traveling salesman, for \$4,200.

John and wife Mary moved in to no. 27 with their grown children, Edith, a clerk in the Department of Justice, later a secretary at the Supreme Court, Frank, a long-time employee of Plaunt's (later Dover's) Hardware, a fixture on Sparks St until the 1970s, and John jr. The family continued to live there for 51 years. Vallillee appears to have paid cash for the house – there was no mortgage until 1937 when Vallillee borrowed \$1,000 against the 6.42 strip of land on lot 4, presumably to finance major repairs to the house. Also about this time the detached woodshed was converted into a garage.

The Vallillees were not the only family on the block to reach the 50 year mark, and this stability was one of the reasons cited in 1982 when the first block of Sweetland Avenue was one of five areas of Sandy Hill declared a heritage conservation area under the Ontario Heritage Act. The designation also noted that the block “retain[ed] a very high degree of architectural integrity” and “a strong sense of ‘village’ identity”, and had a continuous history of occupation by prominent civil servants and businessmen.

Although the original designation did not document individual houses, a more recent assessment for the 2010 draft Sandy Hill Heritage Study rated the heritage value of no 27 at 2 out of 4, giving high ratings for age and development context, architectural characteristics (“eclectic mix of styles: decorative woodwork on gables, stone quoins...and keystones”), stylistic influence (“picturesque Gothic Revival with Italianate influences” and architectural integrity.

Edith, the last surviving member of the Vallillee family, sold the house in 1980 to Hartley Millman for \$61,000. Millman resold almost at once to Robert Tremblay, a lawyer, and his wife Judy, for \$79,000. The Tremblays initially rented out the property, but in 1987 took out a new mortgage to finance major renovations, and moved in themselves briefly before selling it in 1990 for \$290,000 to Kathryn McCallion. Ms McCallion, a veteran Trade Commissioner, High Commissioner to Jamaica and senior manager at the Department of Foreign Affairs until her retirement in 2009, lived in the house, when not on posting, until her recent death.