



A SOCIAL AND LEGAL OVERVIEW OF 842 BYRON AVENUE,  
OTTAWA

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A Social and Legal History of 842 Byron Avenue

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Website <http://househistory.tricolour.ca/>

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Cover photograph from the Courtenay House website

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*A house history is a living document...it is always evolving – author unknown*

The house at 842 Byron Avenue is unique in its historical associations with the pioneer McKellar family and the developers of McKellar Townsite. Since its construction in 1913, the house has housed families from a wide range of backgrounds, usually with the owner in residence.

## The Thomsons and McKellars, 1817-1911

The brothers William and John Thomson arrived in Nepean Township in 1817 and through investment and careful husbandry developed a valuable farm, marked by 'Maplelawn', the house and garden they built in 1831. In 1840 the brothers split the property, and John took the western portion, building his own, more modest, stone house also on the north side of Richmond Road (now the McKellar-Bingham House).

Archibald McKellar bought most of John Thomson's farm from his heirs in 1873. With later additions this extended roughly from the Ottawa River to Carling Avenue and from Fraser Avenue to Courtenay Avenue. Archibald and later his son John developed one of the most prosperous beef and dairy farms in Nepean, specializing in delivering fresh milk and meat to the Ottawa market. John, indeed, was in 1900 one of the founders of the Ottawa Dairy, one of the first companies in Canada to organize the bottling and delivery of milk in sanitized re-usable bottles.

With the opening in 1900 of the streetcar line along Richmond Road to Britannia, property syndicates were eager to buy the abutting lands for subdivision. With no family to carry on the farm, John decided in 1911 to sell most of his land to the McKellar Townsite

**McKELLAR TOWNSITE**

On River Front and Britannia Line.  
**A Model Place for a Permanent Home — Pure Water, Pure Air.**

**A sane, safe, sure and legitimate investment.**  
**An investment which will bear the closest inspection.**  
Some of the finest lots are still left. To see this property is to buy. Let us take you out on the street car and show you. It will only take you 10 minutes.  
**A Building Restriction of \$1,000 TO \$2,000.**

**McKELLAR TOWNSITE**  
TOWNSHIP OF NEPEAN

While you enjoy almost all the conveniences of the city  
**YOU'RE TAXES**  
are at the  
**COUNTY RATE**  
Wide streets.  
Beautiful Park.

**COUPON**  
Mail this coupon to our Ottawa office if you cannot call.  
W. H. Tate, 279 Bank St.  
Please send me full particulars regarding McKellar Townsite to the following address:  
Name: .....  
Address: .....

**Lots bought NOW will double in value in twelve months.**  
**Only 55 Days to Get a Lot at Present Prices.**

**W. H. TATE, Agent.**  
279 Bank Street. Phone 3361.

The first ad for the McKellar Townsite, Journal 22 May 1911

Company for \$150,000, and his homestead to John Bingham, manager of the Ottawa Dairy. John and his sister Margaret retired to a new home on the north side of Richmond Road. (For the McKellars, see Elliot 1991 ch. 5-6, for sale and retirement see Registry Office, *Journal* 1911-05-06 p 15, City Directories).

## W.H. Tate Builds the house, 1913

The Townsite Company hired William Hugh Tate, a prominent real estate and insurance agent in Ottawa as sales agent and manager. Tate advertised aggressively, stressing the low taxes and convenience of the area, the availability of services such as water and hydro, and the value of its lots as an investment. To ensure the latter, lots were priced at \$600 (compared to as little as \$250 in Westboro) and deeds restricted the size and type of house that could be built (Elliot 1991 p 193ff, Registry Office).

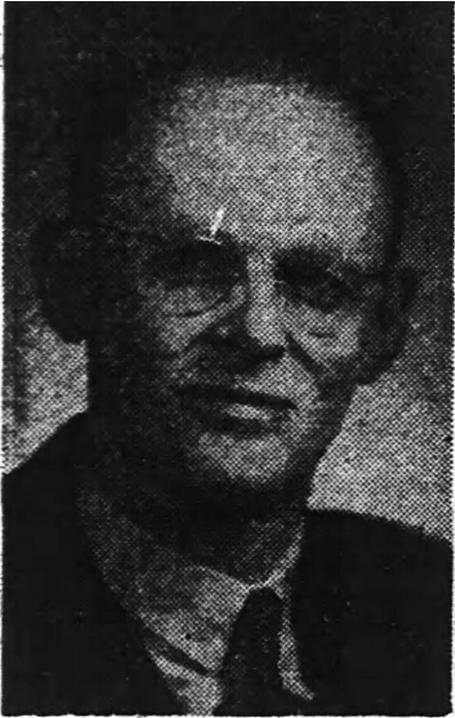
Tate himself bought the lot at the south-east corner of Alonzo (Byron) Avenue and Seventh (Courtenay) Avenue in January 1912 and built the present house. The Tates moved in 1913, and in February 1914 Mrs Tate announced to the press that she was ready to receive formal calls in her new home. She was “at home” every Tuesday afternoon (Registry Office, *Journal* 1914-02-14 p 8).

Lots sold well, but mostly as investments. By 1930, only 48 of the over 1,000 lots in McKellar actually had houses on them. During the First World War, the Townsite Company supported the campaign of the Ottawa Vacant Lot Association to turn vacant land into gardens to grow “needed foodstuffs”. By 1917 over 17 acres of unsold lot were under cultivation. Tate also captained the Nepean team organizing the sale of savings bonds to fund the war effort. (Elliott 1991 p 224 , *Journal* 1917-07-03 p 12, 1919-11-13 p12).

Mrs Tate hosted a final event, a reception for the Westboro unit of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, in February 1921, after which the Tates sold and W.H. retired from the Company. The new owner was none other than Margaret McKellar, who moved across Richmond Road from the house she had shared with her brother John. Margaret lived in the house with her sister Jane Scobie, a widow, Jane’s two daughters, and a young cousin, Malcolm McKellar, until she passed away in 1929 (*Journal* 1921-02-21 p 9, 1929-04-30 p 4).

## Later Residents, 1929-date

The Scobies sold the house in 1931 to George Read, a senior official with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. After George’s death about 1940, Mr and Mrs Edgar Woolsey came to live with the widowed Rebecca Read. During the First World War, George and Edgar had both held commissions in the 43rd Rifles, a local unit with many prominent



**J. P. ERICHSEN-BROWN, Bar-**  
rister, formerly a member of the  
firm of Erichsen-Brown and  
Erichsen-Brown of Toronto, who  
has opened an office in Ottawa at  
48 Elgin street

From the Ottawa Journal 28 Feb 1946

officers, including Sir Percy Sherwood, Chief of the Dominion Police. Mrs Woolsey in particular was “in Society”, sharing duties as patron with women like Senator Cairine Wilson and Lady Borden, wife of the former Prime Minister (RO, *Journal* 1941-04-25 p 12, 1943-02-23).

From 1945 the house belonged to John Price Erichsen-Brown and his wife Charlotte. Erichsen-Brown, a noted barrister, moved from Toronto to Eastview in 1946, coming to Alonzo Avenue in 1950 and moving on to Rockliffe in 1953. Both John and Charlotte had high-profile lives: he was active in the Ottawa Civil Liberties Association, the RA Chess Club, the Property Owners’ Association (representing commercial landowners) and was Chair of the Eastview High School Board for some years. As a lawyer, he defended Emma Woikin, a cypher clerk at External Affairs who was convicted, in the wake of the

Gouzenko affair, of passing secrets to the Russians, and was also involved in Strathcona Heights, the City’s first attempt at public housing.

Charlotte was equally active in the home and school associations at Eastview and the Broadview public schools, and in organizing fund-raising events for the Ottawa Philharmonic Orchestra and the Ottawa Ballet during that short period after the War when Ottawa attracted artists and musicians from across Canada. In later years, Charlotte became active in the revival of interest in herbs and medicinal plants, publishing a book (still in print) *The Uses of Plants for the past 500 years* in 1978.

The house received its first number for mail delivery, 692 Alonzo Avenue, during the 1940s. About the same time Seventh Avenue was renamed Courtenay, after the first res-

idents on the Street. In 1951, after annexation to Ottawa, the name "Byron" used in Ottawa West was extended to cover the whole street, and the house renumbered to 842.

Building in McKellar began in earnest after the Second World War, and in 1958 the vacant lot next door, originally bought by Margaret McKellar in 1920, was sold. From 1962-1997 the house was occupied by the O'Doherty family, Marie-Jeanne, her husband Harold, a railwayman with Canadian National, and after Harold's death by their son James.

The current owner, Gary Lacey, bought and renovated the house in 2008 as a bed and breakfast, operating as "Courtenay House".

## Sources for more information

### *Abbreviations used in footnotes*

CD - City Directories

DCB - Dictionary of Canadian Biography

LAC - Library and Archives Canada

RO - Ontario Land Registry Office no 4

VL- Voters Lists for Federal Elections (accessible through [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com))

### *Sources*

*Ancestry.com - a database of family-related information from multiple sources (directories, newspapers, census, birth, marriage and death records, etc.) In some cases records (e.g. census, marriage registers) have been posted as a whole, in other cases individuals post information they have come across. Access by subscription. The institutional version can be consulted without charge at the City of Ottawa Archives.*

*City Directories - published annually (or more recently biennially) can be consulted on micro-film at the Ottawa Public Library, or in paper at Library and Archives Canada. The Directories list the names of adult residents house-by-house. Older volumes also indicate occupation, sometimes age and relationship, and whether the resident was an owner or renter. Especially in later years, Directory information is not always reliable.*

*Dictionary of Canadian Biography (available online without charge),*

*Elliott, Bruce Nepean: the City Beyond. Nepean: City of Nepean, 1991 - A history of the former City of Nepean. useful because much of the former City of Ottawa was at some point within the municipality of Nepean, and much of the development of Nepean was an extension of or response to the growth of Ottawa.*

*Library and Archives Canada. The website [collections.ca](https://collections.ca) provides access to those parts of the collection that have been digitized, as well as introductions to their other collections of material.*

*Ottawa Citizen - articles from the Ottawa Citizen newspaper are in the Google News Archive, and can be searched through Google, or through a link at the site "[ottawahh.com](https://ottawahh.com)" which provides a better interface.*

*Ottawa Journal - articles from the former Ottawa Journal newspaper can be searched on Newspapers.com, a subscription-based service which can be consulted without charge at the City of Ottawa Archives and the Ottawa Public Library.*

Ontario Land Registry Office 4, Judicial district of Ottawa-Carleton, located at the Court House on Elgin Street. *Abstract records trace all instruments (deeds, mortgages and other contracts) registered against a property. All records before the mid-to-late 1990s can be consulted without charge on microfilm. More recent records are online: instruments can be consulted without charge, but a fee is charged to consult the abstracts.*

Taylor, John *Ottawa, an Illustrated History*. Toronto,: Lorimer, 1986 - *a work with more of a focus on themes of urban history in Canada than the Elliott history.*

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## Other Ottawa house histories by Marc Lowell and partners

Available for reference in the Ottawa Public Library Main Branch, Ottawa Room

Posted online at <http://househistory.tricolour.ca/>

“Caplans in the Capital”: the Caplan family

### ***Centretown***

46 Cartier St (former Carmichael Inn and Spa)  
25 Gilmour St  
43 Gilmour St (Clarke House)  
45 Gilmour St (Fagan House)  
59 Maclaren St (Harris House)  
660 Maclaren St (available online through [johnkingteam.com/blog](http://johnkingteam.com/blog))  
18 Queen Elizabeth Driveway (Haydon House)  
25 Somerset St W (Addams House)  
300 Somerset St W (Mamma Teresa’s Ristorante)  
110 Waverley St  
117 Waverley St (available online through [johnkingteam.com/blog](http://johnkingteam.com/blog))

### ***Lowertown***

507 and 509 Clarence St  
518 Clarence St  
524 Clarence St / 102 Wurtemberg St  
18 and 20 Rockwood Ave  
78 and 80 Wurtemberg St

### ***New Edinburgh***

113 Crichton St

### ***Sandy Hill***

585 Besserer St  
633 Cumberland Street  
89 Daly Ave (Gasthaus Switzerland)  
27 Goulbourn Ave (available online through [johnkingteam.com/blog](http://johnkingteam.com/blog))  
27 Sweetland Ave (available online through [johnkingteam.com/blog](http://johnkingteam.com/blog))

### ***McKellar***

842 Byron Ave