



## A Social and Legal Overview of 842 Byron Avenue, Ottawa

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

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Cover photograph: 842 Byron Avenue from the Courtenay House website

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## A Social and Legal Overview of 842 Byron Avenue

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 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 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, sale and retirement Registry Office, *Journal* 1911-05-06 p 15, City Directories).

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

# McKELLAR TOWNSITE

On River Front and Britannia Line.

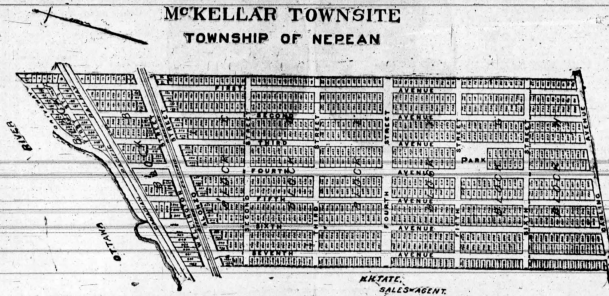
**A Model Place for a Permanent Home — Pure Water, Pure Air.**

**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.**



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*, Friday 22 May 1911.

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 non 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).

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 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 Rockcliffe 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 residents 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".

## Index of Names

John Price Erichsen-Brown and Charlotte Louise Erichsen-Brown (fl 1945-1978)

children of Archibald McKellar (d 1889):

John McKellar (d 1914)

Margaret McKellar (d 1929)

Jane McKellar Gray Scobie (fl 1890-1931)

William Hugh Tate (d 1929) and his wife Edna

Harold O'Doherty and Marie-Jeanne O'Doherty (fl 1962-1997 ).

George Read (d ca 1940) and Rebecca Read (fl 1931-1945)

Edgar Woolsey and wife (fl 1940-43)

## List of Sources

*Ancestry.com - a subscription-based online service which can be consulted at the City Archives - brings together references from the Census, registers of births, marriages and deaths and other sources contributed by families.*

*City Directories - published annually (or more recently biennially), can be consulted on microfilm at the Ottawa Public Library, or in paper at Library and Archives Canada. Entries before 1950 are under the suburb of "Woodroffe", shown as 'south side Richmond Rd', 'east side Seventh Ave' or 'Alonzo Ave'.*

*Elliott, Bruce Nepean: the City Beyond. Nepean: City of Nepean, 1991 -*

*Journal - articles from the former Ottawa Journal newspaper can be searched on Newspapers.com, a subscription-based service which can be consulted at the City of Ottawa Archives.*

*RO - Ontario Land Registry Office 4, Judicial district of Ottawa-Carleton.*

*- 1808-1911 listed under lot 28, Con 1, Ottawa Front, Nepean Township*

*- 1911-1991 listed by parcel number under section Carleton, as follows*

*- Property as owned by John McKellar, 1911 listed as parcel 81*

*- portion sold to Townsite Company, 1911 listed as parcel 83*

*- lot 954 (site of 842 Byron), 1912 listed as parcel 178*

*- combined lots 953 and 954, 1929, listed as parcel 1277*

*- lot 954 when sold 1962 listed as parcel 6321*

*- 1991 to date, described as lot 954, registered plan M29*

## 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  
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  
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))