



A SOCIAL AND LEGAL OVERVIEW OF 660 MACLAREN STREET,  
OTTAWA

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

Ottawa of the 1880s enjoyed the social cachet of its role as capital, but the heart of the economy was the milling of softwood lumber. The streets around the Chaudière and Rideau Falls echoed to the roar and whine of saws turning millions of board feet of timber floated down from the upper valley into lumber to feed the hungry builders of Boston and New York. Sawdust clogged the strips of mud that passed for streets and fouled rivers and streams. Burning sawdust darkened the sky. Stacks of drying lumber filled every available space at the Chaudière, along Dow's Lake, the Canal and the Rideau River.

William Hamilton, a partner in William and Fraser, was a small part of this great industry. In the 1890s he searched for an appropriate home for his family, one that would express both his position as an established businessman and his faith in the future. Despite the rapid growth of the city (the population grew from 44,000 in 1891 to 59,000 in 1901), he found one only half-a-dozen blocks from his factory, on the By Estate.

## The By Estate and Lumbering

How did it happen that such fine lots were available so close to the economic heart of Ottawa even thirty years after the start of the lumber boom?

Lt-Col John By, builder of the Rideau Canal, laid out a townsite on the government's land (north of Wellington and Rideau Streets), and in 1831 bought a substantial property for himself, (the area bounded today by Bronson Avenue, Laurier Avenue, the Rideau River, Mann Avenue and Gladstone Avenue, less the substantial reserve for the Rideau Canal), expecting to share in the profits from the expansion of the new settlement. However, By returned to England almost at once, and never returned before his death in 1836.

In his will, By left the property to his family (his two daughters and Percy Ashburnham, husband of Esther, the elder daughter), with the condition that the land could be let, but not sold. The heirs and their manager, William Stewart (businessman and owner of the land south of Gladstone Avenue) soon realized they faced two major problems in generating a profit from the land.

The first was lack of demand. By had expected that he could subdivide his land and sell it for urban development, but even after the signing of a free-trade agreement with the United States sparked the lumber boom in Ottawa (as it had become in 1855), there were simply too many landlords chasing potential buyers, and here the second problem put the heirs at a disadvantage.

Restricting the sale of land in a will was a common practice in England. When accumulation of wealth was slow, and land was the ultimate store of value, it was one of the legal tools that ensured that a spendthrift heir could not ruin utterly the future prospects of his family. However, in Canada, where land could be purchased cheaply on every hand, it made no sense. Fortunately for the heirs, Robert Baldwin, the famous leader of the Reform Party, was in the same situation, and spurred changes in property law in Canada to place a time-limit on such restrictions.

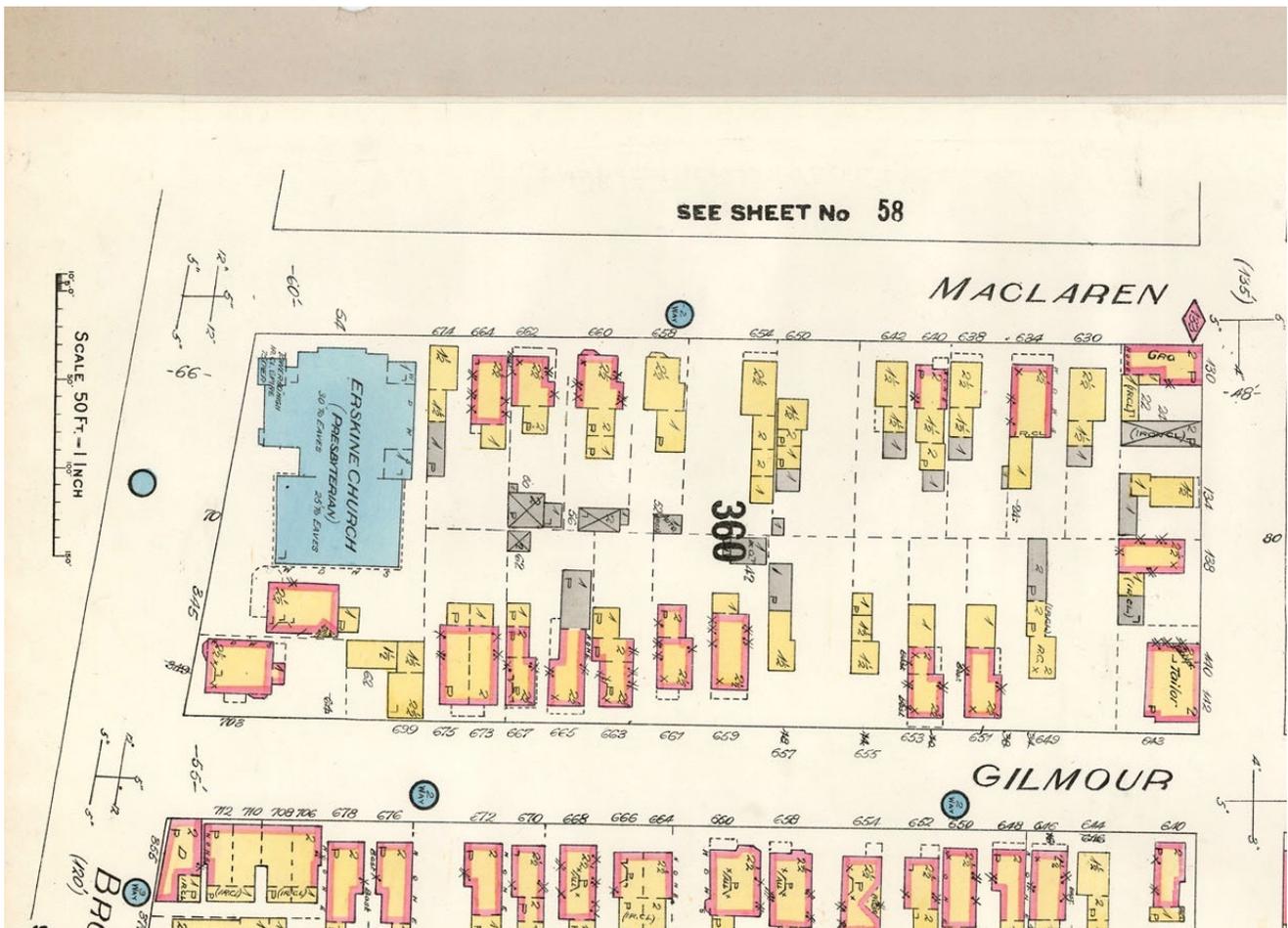
So it was that in 1876 the heirs were finally able to sell their land to the Ottawa Freehold Association, a partnership of the lumberman James Maclaren, mill-owner Robert Blackburn and banker Charles Magee. The Association recast the street layout to the one familiar today, including the naming of Maclaren Street for one of its principals, but only gradually released individual blocks of land for sale: the area south of Somerset and west of Bank Street did not come onto the market until 1889.

## The Hamiltons and Tates 1898-1910

William A Hamilton was a partner in Hamilton and Fraser, a planing mill and sash and door factory at 46 Elm Street (corner of Rochester). Though we must imagine

this as more like a large garage than a real factory, there was a steady demand for windows and doors, and Hamilton must have been infused with the optimistic mood sparked by the long economic boom of the day.

Bronson and Maclaren offered a suitable site for a new home: in an area that was starting to build up, close to the highest point in central Ottawa, but within a few minutes' walk of his business. In an unusual arrangement, Hamilton and the purchasers of



Maclaren Street from the Fire Insurance Map of 1915. 660 is the fourth house to the right of Erskine Church. Note the sheds in the back yard, and the width of the lots compared with neighbouring houses.

658 and 662 Maclaren arranged to buy two double lots and split them to provide three extra-wide lots (33 feet instead of the usual 25 feet). They then appear to have contracted with one builder to have three almost identical houses built: two and half storeys,

with fashionable double parlours and bay windows and a large verandah with its own entrance to the “family” parlour. The wood shed was not attached to the house, but at the far end of the back yard. It appears that only Hamilton had his house faced with brick.

We know very little about the Hamilton family, but they were able to enjoy their new house for only a few years. In 1901 the Great Fire wiped out Lebreton Flats and its mills, feeding on the stacks of lumber and piles of sawdust. Hamilton and Fraser lost their business, but were able to reopen nearby at 248 Lebreton Street. Whether because of financial pressures connected to the fire or other reasons, Hamilton sold the house in 1903 to Edith and Christopher Armstrong, a foreman, for \$2,350.

# McKELLAR TOWNSITE

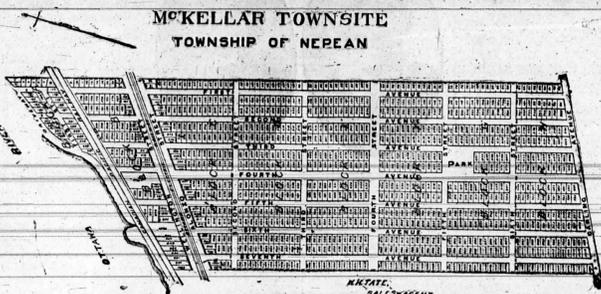
On River Front and Britannia Line.  
**A Model Place for a Permanent Home — Pure Water, Pure Air.**

**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.

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are at the  
**COUNTY RATE**

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Beautiful Park.

**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 Armstrongs lived in the house along with another relative for only two years, giving it in 1905 to a James Warne, who immediately sold it to William H Tate.

Tate was a real estate and insurance agent with offices at 279-281 Bank Street at Somerset (the current site of Co-operative House). Tate was a high profile businessman, “always good for a quote” for the press, and also active in Erskine Church, and after a split in that congregation in the break-away Westminster Church (now the apartment

building at Lyon and Maclaren Streets). He is perhaps most famous as the agent for the development of the McKellar Townsite (the land south of Richmond Road and east of Woodroffe Avenue). Tate sold the house in 1910, renting accommodation in other parts of Centretown until he moved to a new house in McKellar in 1913. The one notable change during this time was an arrangement to trade rights of way with the neighbour at 662, suggesting that one or the other had acquired a motorcar and needed access to a garage.

The new buyer was Herbert Watt, initially a carpenter but later a mechanic at an Imperial Oil garage at 310 Percy Street, corner of Chamberlain (now under the Queensway). He sold in 1919 but arranged with the new owners to live in the house until 1921.

## The Mathers and after (1921-date)

The house then became a family homestead as the Mathers moved into the house in 1921 and lived in it for two generations, 66 years, selling only in 1987. Donald Mather, a milkman with the Ottawa Dairy (located until the 1970s on Somerset west of Bank), his wife Mary and their eight children (some already adults) moved into the house. Donald died in 1939, but Mary continued to live there after she transferred ownership to their son Henry and his wife Mildred in 1949. Henry was a railway mail clerk (i.e. he sorted mail as it was carried from town to town on the train) and later a supervisor at the Post Office.

Daniel Stripinis, a consultant, and his wife Margarethe Roy, a nurse, bought the house in 1987. As well as living in the house, they ran a music studio ("The Gallery of Arts and Music") as well as other businesses on and off ("Canada Cure" and "Just Divorce"). In 2001 the current residents purchased the house and have restored it to its original distinction, maintaining where possible remaining original elements (e.g the main floor bay window)

## Sources for more information

### *Abbreviations used in footnotes*

CD - City Directories

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.*

*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