

# The London and Middlesex

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# HISTORIAN

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The London and Middlesex Historical Society

## The London and Middlesex Historical Society

The London and Middlesex Historical Society was established in 1901 to promote awareness in the local heritage of London and Middlesex County. The aims of the Society are to encourage the research, discussion, presentation and publication of local history topics. The Society is affiliated with the Ontario Historical Society and also works with other community culture and heritage organizations.

Awareness of local history is actively promoted through education, public meetings, tours, and demonstrations, and by encouraging young people to learn about and appreciate the past. The Society

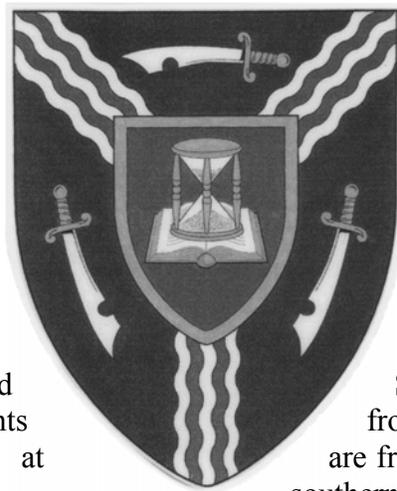
provides support and encouragement of historical research and the preservation of materials and memorabilia, relating to the heritage of the region. Working with community partners, the Society encourages the identification and preservation of historically, architecturally and archaeologically valuable buildings, sites and areas.

Membership is open to anyone with an interest in the Society's objectives and activities. Annual membership includes free admission to meetings, special tours and presentations as well as materials published by the Society.

### Heraldic Shield

The London and Middlesex Historical Society's heraldic shield was created in 1992. Unveiled on Canada Day, it was designed by Guy St-Denis with the assistance of Roger Gardiner and rendered by Rob Turner.

The back-ground colour of the outer shield is green, and inspired by the county's forests and farms. The wavy Y-shaped device, a pall or shakefork represents the forks of the Thames River at London.



The combination of alternating silver and blue stripes is a standard heraldic stylization for water. The hour glass on the book which is set in a blue inner shield, is a conceptualization for history. Contrary to popular belief, the seaxes (or Saxon swords) do not illustrate a growing militarism within the Society; rather, they are borrowed from the Middlesex County shield and are frequently used in coats of arms from southern England.

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Front cover: *Servant's Magazine 1869*

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## Editorial

This volume of *The Historian* looks at three very different topics, however all have one thing in common. Each article, in some shape or form deals with a side of London's past that is rarely examined in such detail and in a way, each deals with an element of controversy.

Tara Wittmann's article looks at the class divide between servants and the served. In it we learn about the work involved by the mistress of the house and what life would have been like for those who worked in a household during the late Victorian era and early 20th century. It becomes obvious that there were challenges for both sides, with a careful balance for both, even at Eldon House where Amelia Harris is understood to have been a fair and patient employer.

Marvin Simner's article on the London Waterworks Controversy of 1875-1877, shows us that Londoners have always understood the importance of the use and purity of our water supply. Back then it was a crucial means to help avoid illness and ensure we had the ability to further safeguard the city by fighting fires. However, even such basic concerns can become complicated when dealing with

municipal committees, as London saw during the planning and building of the waterworks. It required several years and multiple bylaws to finally come to fruition.

Londoners may also be surprised to learn from John Lisowski's article, that the Ku Klux Klan was active in this community during the late 1920s. His article provides interesting insight into how the Klan attempted to organize itself here, and how those affected by its activities would never forget. Regardless of the intent of the Klan, the city of London held strongly onto its high moral principles, showing a strict intolerance for the kind of actions that the Klan were becoming known for. Not surprisingly, their membership in this region was short lived.

Today, London still sees its share of divides, whether through city finances and policies, cultural issues or incidents involving class or race. However, if citizens and officials take heed of the lessons learned through our rich history, London's strong moral compass will continue to stay true, allowing all residents and visitors to feel that London is and remains a city where all people are welcomed and safe, no matter their religion, skin colour or culture.

Roxanne Lutz  
Editor



## **Guidelines for Authors**

The Editor welcomes manuscript submissions on all aspects of the history of London and Middlesex County, independent of period, including articles on historic neighbourhoods.

All correspondence regarding editorial matters should be addressed to:

The London and Middlesex Historian  
c/o The London and Middlesex Historical Society  
Box 303, Station B  
London, Ontario  
N6A 4W1

Manuscripts should be approximately 2,000 to 4,000 words, double-spaced and submitted electronically using Microsoft Word. Articles of longer length should be vetted with the publisher before submission.

A cover letter should be included with each submission, stating:

- a) that the manuscript is not and will not be under concurrent consideration by another journal (publication by the author at a later date remains the right of the author);
- b) that all co-authors have read and approved of the submission; and
- c) any relevant permissions for use of images submitted if not in the public domain.

If used, illustrations and or photographs should accompany the manuscript. When possible, documents should be provided electronically, at a quality level no less than 300dpi. It is preferable for publication permissions to be obtained by the author, however when necessary the Society will cover the cost of illustration reproduction at the recommendation of the Editor.

Captions should be included for photographs and illustrations submitted, either within the manuscript or at the end of the article. Caption information should include the date, photographer or artist and if known the source and any credit information.



(Figure #1) "Servant's Magazine" 1869.

## The Servant Question: Exploring the two worlds of Eldon House

Tara Wittmann

*GOOD TEMPER SHOULD BE CULTIVATED by every mistress, as upon it the welfare of the household may be said to turn; indeed, its influence can hardly be overestimated, as it has the effect of moulding the characters of those around her, and of acting most beneficially on the happiness of the domestic circle. Every head of a household should strive to be cheerful, and should never fail to show a deep interest in all that appertains to the well-being of those who claim the protection of her roof. Gentleness, not partial and temporary, but universal and regular, should pervade her conduct; for where such a spirit is habitually manifested, it not only delights her children, but makes her domestics attentive and respectful; her visitors are also pleased by it, and their happiness is increased.*

*Isabella Beeton, Book of Household Management<sup>1</sup>*

### Background

**B**uilt in 1834, Eldon House is the oldest surviving dwelling in London. From 1834-1959, Eldon House was the residence of four generations of the Harris family and the servants that were employed to maintain the household. During their 125 year tenure at Eldon House, the Harris family was actively involved in the local community and travelled widely. Many family members recorded their experiences, in the form of diaries and letters. These accounts, together with the Harris household belongings, provide a detailed and fascinating glimpse into London's history. In 1960 the great-grandchildren of the original owners John and Amelia Harris, donated Eldon House and its 11-acre property to the City of London. The rich material culture exhibited in the home is complemented by archival documents and photographs preserved in Western University's Archives. The museum thus reveals a particularly rich picture of upper

class family life in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century London, while the archives illustrate social matters concerning the development of London and Canada. In order to fully explore the story of Eldon House, the *full* household must be represented.

The scope of this article aims to explore domestic life of upper-middle class households in the late Victorian era and early 20th century, using Eldon House as a case study. With primary material of both servant and served as well as the ephemera that influenced the structure of their relationships, a glimpse into the domestic life in London Ontario may be revealed.

Consideration of the locale of London needs to be taken into account when considering what was typical or expected in the early to mid-Victorian period. The guidelines that demarked the boundaries between servants and served were clearly set and observed, yet originated from Britain. As will be explored, employers could not always afford to strictly adhere to the rules

of employment as their British counterparts, due to the low population of the area and lack of domestic training available. Also, in the case of the Harris family, who was firmly rooted in the idea of being a self-made clan thanks to Eldon House's first owner John, one can find a conscious effort made to provide opportunities to individuals in distressed circumstances or those who had a desire to alter their trajectories.

**Roles and relationships of servant and served**

The Victorian mindset was a hierarchical one, where societal classes had their own concerns and traditions which would seldom converge. Clear roles for individuals would be outlined through formalized rules of etiquette. A plethora of books were published for an audience hungry to conform to "proper behaviour"—where a grave misunderstanding might take place for a simple misjudged action, one could never be too careful.

Books of Victorian etiquette were geared to the emerging upper-middle class, whose fortunes swelled as the result of industrialism and British imperialism. Suddenly, "how-to" manuals were in print, designed to aid those who had not been reared in the class in which they now found themselves. Perhaps the most recognizable book of this style is *Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management* published in 1861 (figure 2). The tome was comprised of information for "the Mistress and all levels of servant — including also Sanitary, Medical, & Legal Memoranda, with a History of the Origin, Properties, and Uses

of all Things Connected with Home Life and Comfort." It was intended as a guide of reliable information for the aspirant middle classes as well as the servants who tended them.



(Figure #2) Front piece of Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management, 1861.

Just as there existed publications geared toward the upper and middle classes that spoke to the issues of keeping servants, there too were publications specifically for the domestic worker, touching on the opposite sentiment: on how to live with an employer and perform ones duties to the best possible result (figure 1). Thus an Elaborate social structure was set up and understood between employer and employee

which would allow not only for efficient household management, but also attempt to smooth differences in class, behavior and communication.

### **Servants Life at Eldon House**

There were always servants at Eldon House, the actual number varied depending on the financial state of the family at any particular time, or on the fashion of the day. The Harris's once estimated that over the 125 years they lived at Eldon House, they must have had about 200 different servants. Some stayed for a short time only (the record was just a few hours) while others stayed for their entire working lives.

Typically, there was a cook responsible for meals and managing the kitchen. Additionally, a parlour maid was employed, who served meals, answered bells, and did only light housework, and one or two housemaids, who did the heavy cleaning (scrubbing, sweeping, cleaning fireplaces, emptying chamber pots, etc.). Sometimes a nursemaid was required, as when Helen Portman, daughter of John and Amelia Harris, died in childbirth and a woman who had recently given birth was hired as "wet nurse" for the Harris grandchild. A governess would be engaged in the very early years before Amelia Harris began writing a journal – this position was a difficult one to categorize as the woman was usually of a better class than other servants and inhabited a middle-ground, neither one of the family nor one of the servants. These women would have lived in the house and would have typically had their own rooms.

Male servants mainly did outside work at Eldon House such as the gardening and looking after the horses and were more apt to come in on a daily basis and who lived

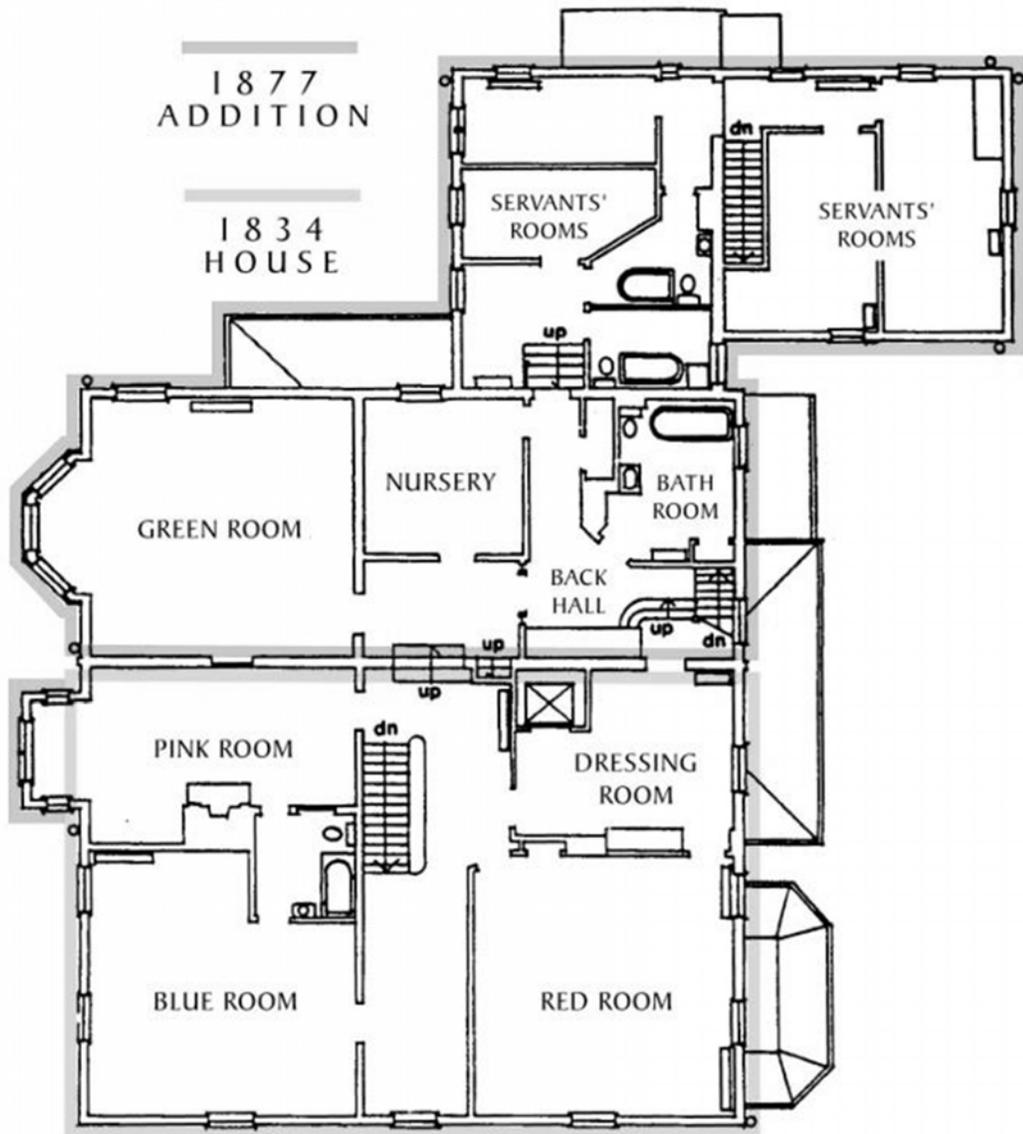
in their own accommodations. Though the family briefly had a butler, it soon became clear that they required a general manservant who would carry wood for the fires and do other heavy labour. In the absence of a butler, the cook acted as the lead domestic in the household.

The days were long ones for the servants at Eldon House – usually rising at 7 a.m, and getting back to bed from 10-11 p.m. The duties of the day would be interrupted by an hour "dinner" (or lunch – their biggest meal of the day, usually hot) and a half-hour "supper" (smaller, cold).

### **Going "into service"**

Service in the Victorian era was a calling for which workers would commit their lives to the families they worked for. A servant was expected to be loyal, diligent, hardworking, and obedient, not absent without permission, nor have visitors, nor cause harm to their master and were not permitted to drink or gamble. In exchange for a servant's effort, their employer provided payment, usually monthly. In Canada by the late nineteenth century a female servant received about five or six dollars a month, while a male servant would earn twice that amount. Room and board was paid for as was a uniform, and several changes of apron, etc. Presents were always exchanged at Christmas as well as on birthdays.

Servants between themselves would have their own hierarchy – usually based on responsibility and proximity to the masters. This hierarchy would be observed in an almost despotic manner – in large households, the butler and the cook took on the role of master and mistress below stairs, the butler carving the meat, the cook



## ELDON HOUSE

### SECOND FLOOR

*(Figure #3) Floor plan of upper story at Eldon House.*

reprimanding lazy workers. Additionally, rules of etiquette also would relate to the servant class. For example, a veil or a parasol could not be used by a housemaid, but could be used by a ladies maid.

The architecture of a house also contributed to the autonomy of the servants – in that they occupied their own quarters, usually surrounding the kitchen. At Eldon House, the arrangements were not the typically “Upstairs/Downstairs” where the sleeping arrangements were in the attics and work space in the basement, but rather “Front/Back” as can be seen in the pictured floorplan (*figure 3*). The servants occupied over one-quarter of the home, had their own bathroom with running water and their own entrance and exit. In fact, the mailing address in which the servants received their post was different from the Harris family address. From both servant and family testimonials, one derives the sense that the privacy of the inhabitants in the two “households” at Eldon House was respected.

The choice of a domestic worker to go “into service” was often considered a calling or vocation – those happiest in their profession gave their lives over to their work, choosing often to remain unmarried and in service to a single family for their lifetime. Alternatively, if the job was one chosen in desperation or duress, it could not be a happy state. The days were long, the work was hard, and the thanks few. In the mid-1860s, Arnold Bennet, a critic of the servant system would write that a servant was a “dehumanized drudge” who was expected to work 14-16 hours a day, eating mainly leftovers and had to be content with 1 full day off a month, 1 free evening a week, ½ a day off on Sunday and a week’s vacation a year<sup>2</sup>. Certainly, entering service was

something gone into with caution – workers were not unionized as would be the case in other professions, and were subject to the scrutiny of employer and co-workers.

One of the most valuable things that a servant possessed was his or her “Character” – this being essentially a letter of reference or recommendation of the individual. The highest praise in such a letter would include mention of being “clean” “reliable” “punctual” or “genteel.” Leaving your employment in a rage of indignation at treatment would result in a “loss of character.” There would be circumstances that induce Amelia Harris to dismiss some of her servants without a reference. According to her diary, on January 13, 1859, “Katherine, the housemaid got tipsy and made confusion at dinner table”<sup>3</sup>, this theme continues several months later with an entry on March 8, 1859, where Amelia recounts that “ Our dinner was very nice, but one decanter of wine has been watered so much that it was scarcely wine and water. Katherine’s weakness betrays itself too often.”<sup>4</sup>

Aside from drinking, other concerns written about in the Harris diaries include stealing, loose morals, violence, gossiping, dishonesty, etc. These things were closely scrutinized by the mistress of the house, so to retain an even balance in the household. Disputes between servants would be frequent – and at worst would be taken up to the mistress of the house to resolve.

One such instance to be recorded by Amelia Harris on June 12, 1860: “Elizabeth<sup>5</sup> is very much troubled about the tale her cook told her mother about Charlie (the groom) and the house maid. Cook says there is an improper intimacy between them, which Elizabeth does not believe, but feels hurt at

the report. I advised her to be very cautious how she listens to reports Roman Catholic servants give against protestant ones. At the same time for her own sake and the sake of those under her care, she should keep a watchful eye over her household.”<sup>6</sup>

### The Mistress

The ultimate responsibility of hiring and retaining domestic staff was in the hands of the “Mistress of the House.” Consider the following “call to arms” in the following passage by Isabella Beeton: “as with the commander of an army, or the leader of any enterprise, so is it with the mistress of a house. Her spirit will be seen through the whole establishment; and just in proportion as she performs her duties intelligently and thoroughly, so will her domestics follow in her path.”<sup>7</sup>

The role of the Mistress in relation to her servants was varied: certainly she would advertise for positions, obtain a character reference upon hiring, and would outline tasks, and ensure that a servant was observant of these duties. This role can clearly be seen in the diary and letters of Lucy Harris. Lucy was the doyenne of her home Raleigh House and then at Eldon House. She struggled with domestic affairs, including the hiring of servants. Her difficulties in household management can be gleaned from her diary entry of February 11, 1872 when she writes “Advertised for a cook on the Herald, and Free Press and the Advertiser, no answer...Ellen [maid] does seem satisfied to stay and girls are so hard to get. My accounts are a mess. God grant that I may become more patient.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed patience, as well as feeling the burden of the responsibilities tied to the mistress of the household is a topic that Lucy continues to relate in her



(Figure #4) Amelia Harris, c. 1879.  
Collection: Eldon House.

diary, when praying for patience with her staff as she promises herself to keep quiet on domestic affairs with her husband “as he dislikes it so much.”<sup>9</sup> Throughout Lucy’s accounts, one can glean that she was an unwilling leader (in Beeton’s terms) when it came to her domestic arrangements. She actively became familiar with the art of housekeeping, the personal concerns of her staff as well as became the keeper of account books. These documents in themselves are fascinating, providing insight into the cost of living and of keeping domestic staff. According to Lucy Harris’s account ledger

from 1887 (figure 5) the annual expense of \$700 for the four Eldon House servants, would represent \$17,000 in today's funds accounting for the inflation rate.

**How to gain a position**

The way in which servants came to be engaged changed greatly throughout the nineteenth century. Previous to the late 1850s servants relied on word-of mouth recommendations to learn of employment opportunities and often preformed "cold calls" on potential employers to inform them of their availability and interest. In researching the archives of the *London Free Press* and the *London Advertiser* one can find a sudden spike the number of advertisements placed in the 1860s. The most common advertisements found in that period were for employers seeking servant girls, wet nurses or housekeepers. In the late 1860s and early 1870s there was an increased demand for farm servants and for outdoor workers such as gardeners and "men of all work." One sees by the wording of the advertisement's that there was often an ethnic preference indicated by employer, where the majority sought English help, though servants of Scottish origin became popular as well. French speakers interestingly were only in demand for governesses. The "help wanted pages" gained so much in popularity and readership that in the 1870s they were relocated from the back of the publication to the front page.

Expenses 12. Months Eldon		
Servants	700	
Fireing Coal	200	
Wood	60	
Light	70	
Water	32	
Telephone	35	
Taxes	350	
Insurance Fine	30	1457
Market		
vegetables	68	
Fruit	24	
Milk	72	
Tea & coffee	30	
Flour	70	
Eggs	30	
Butter	120	
Fish	24	
Chicken & game	48	486
meat	240	
Groceries	260	500 00

(Figure #5) Lucy Harris's 1887 account ledger. Collection: Eldon House.

In the *London Free Press* archives, there are several instances where the Harris family of Eldon House advertised for servants. One such example, dated to March 9, 1861 is an ad placed for a cook – which was a position in the house that had a fair turn-over<sup>10</sup> (see figure 7).

The ad states: "WANTED, A good female cook. Apply to Mrs. Harris, Eldon House, Ridout Street. Good references will be required."<sup>11</sup>



(Figure #6) Advertisement for Servant, London Free Press, 1858.



(Figure #7) Advertisement for a cook, issued by Amelia Harris in the London Free Press, 1861.

Additionally, as can be gleaned by numerous entries in the Harris Diaries, the family also relied on references from friends and acquaintances, at one time resulting in the hiring of a cook who relocated to Eldon House from England.

### Lived Reality vs. Scripted Etiquette

While the expectations between servant and served were clearly delineated in written guides, class divides and architectural boundaries, the reality of a mix of people living under one roof was much untidier. Naturally close relationships sprang up between the family and their servants and the divide was made blurry. For example, in 1860, Amelia Harris records

her feelings for a long-time servant, Betsy Cameron, who for a year had been in poor health<sup>12</sup>. Eventually Betsy dies in her own home on Christmas day in the company of Amelia – she was there when “Betsy breathed her last” and would continue in attendance, even helping to “lay her out” for the funeral. These don’t seem the actions of a hard hearted employer who, if she followed the rules set out for a good mistress would not show her emotions or act in a friendly manner to one of her inferiors. Such acts of generosity were not uncommon for Amelia Harris, who, when learning of her cook’s intention to marry, offered to host her wedding and reception at Eldon House in the dining room, which indeed she did. The reaction to the news of her cook’s interest in matrimony is amusing, as Amelia wrote on April 15, 1870: “Mrs. Page has given me an astounding piece of information this morning – she is going to be married. She has been with me as cook for more than 9 years and as she must be 60 years of age, I thought she was safe from matrimony. She is a good cook and I fear I shall not be able to get another as good. Yet I cannot regret her marrying as she will get a comfortable home for her old age and will be her own mistress.”<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps more interesting and revealing than Amelia Harris acting kindly to those who she liked and valued, can be found in her diaries as they reveal a number of instances in which she acts for the “greater good” in employing often difficult people. Amelia’s diaries have several occurrences of having to intervene in disagreements in the kitchen in the late 1850s, cajoling the servants to work in harmony. The culprit for



*(Figure #8)  
Mary Klojggard,  
Margaret Mitchell  
and Gladys Harpur,  
c.1940.*

*Collection:  
Eldon House.*



*(Figure #9)  
William Barnett and  
assistant, in what is now  
"Harris Park."  
c. 1940*

*Collection:  
Eldon House.*

the disruptions was invariably Mrs. Panton, the cook, who is described as follows on July 20, 1858: “Mrs. Panton is a good specimen of pride and poverty. She was in a state of starvation when she came to me and I should send her to the same state if I sent her away now as her husband is so lazy no one will employ him for more than a day and no one will take her with her child to service. Yet she cannot eat cold meat and will not notify other servants that their dinner is ready. And yet I pity her. She is hardworking and has a helpless husband, one child and another coming. And what is to become of her?”<sup>14</sup>

### **The Servant Problem**

Into the twentieth century, there came to be a growing dissent on the part of employers and was referred to as “the servant problem.” Countless articles of the period have been written about the issues surrounding the “help” and the increasing difficulty in finding a suitably deferential servant, who was trustworthy and conscientious. Post World War I census records suggest a great drop in the numbers of those entering or returning to “service.” The social hierarchy had shifted after the war, in favour of greater self-sufficiency on part of masters and regulated, well-paying work for employees and more affordable housing for the working class allowed for a new social dynamic.

At Eldon House, the Harris family continued to retain servants. Many of the stories of the servants who worked at the site during the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century were collected by museum staff, when re-creating the servants quarters upstairs in the late 1990’s, and contributed to a compilation called the “Servants Album” available in a reading room at Eldon House. The

documents in the album are the inverse of what exists from the 19<sup>th</sup> century in that the testimonials are that of the servants, not the family that were served. Coupled together, with the understanding that attitudes changed with the eras, the information in the diaries and the servant album tell a story of the extended Harris family. While the structure of the relationships between employer and employee continued to be formal, photographic evidence as well as oral history suggests a positive – and often rather fun – work environment. Additionally, the turnover of staff slowed into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where servants were retained for a career-span, rather than a short duration. Pictured on page 16 (*figure 8*) one can see Mary Klojggard (maid), Margaret Mitchell (cook), Gladys Harpur (house-parlour maid) (c.1940) with Ronald Harris’s trophy pieces at the north west corner of Eldon House, after they removed them from the front hall for their annual cleaning. Margaret Mitchell began working at Eldon House in 1929 and stayed for 30 years, past the point that the house was translated into museum.

Another long-term servant who had the respect and esteem of the Harris’ was a man named William Barnett, acting as head gardener (*see figure 9*). He was employed in 1916 by Ronald Harris and would remain with the family for 46 years. William was responsible for the 11 acres of the property – the ornamental gardens on the top of the hill around the house as well as the extensive vegetable garden on the flood plain below.

At its peak, the vegetable garden required 5 men in the summer and 3 in the winter. A greenhouse was also in his care, as were the swimming pool, jersey cows and the tempestuous boiler. Only in 1962 would William retire from this site.

### Conclusions

Certainly at this moment of contemporary life, few have first-hand experience with the domestic system explored in this article. The expectations of the realities of “service” in today’s mindset is usually one which cannot reconcile the two groups – conceptions of socialism and class injustices and difficulty in re-creating the reality of the historic class-system skews the reality of the domestic system as it was experienced. By using the primary sources related to Eldon House and its inhabitants – both servant and served – the Dickensian negativity that might have been expected has given way to a sense of the nuances of the very close relationships that were experienced.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Beeton, Isabella. *Book of Household Management*, London: S.O. Beeton Press, 1861, pp.82

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, Arnold. *Delphi Collected Works of Arnold Bennett*, Volume 1 of Series Four. London: Delphi Classics, 2013. Pg. 134.

<sup>3</sup> Harris, R., *The Eldon House Diaries*, Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1994, pgs. 90.

<sup>4</sup> Harris, R., *The Eldon House Diaries*, Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1994, pgs. 95.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Loring Harris, married to Amelia’s eldest son John who in 1860 had been married only one year and looked to her mother in law for advice on running her household.

<sup>6</sup> Harris, R., *The Eldon House Diaries*, Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1994, pp. 163.

<sup>7</sup> Beeton, Isabella. *Book of Household Management*, London: S.O. Beeton Press, 1861, pp.80.

<sup>8</sup> Harris, R., *The Eldon House Diaries*, Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1994, pp. 436.

<sup>9</sup> Harris, R., *The Eldon House Diaries*, Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1994, pp. 437.

<sup>10</sup> At one point the family had engaged a consecutive seven cooks in the space of six-months.

<sup>11</sup> “Wanted Advertisement,” *London Free Press*, March 9, 1861. Microfilm, London Room, London Public Library, Central Branch.

<sup>12</sup> Harris, R., *The Eldon House Diaries*, Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1994, pp. 177.

<sup>13</sup> Harris, R., *The Eldon House Diaries*, Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1994, pp. 299.

<sup>14</sup> Harris, R., *The Eldon House Diaries*, Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1994, pp. 78.

## The London Waterworks Controversy The Great Debate of 1875-1877

Marvin L. Simner

**B**y the mid-1870s it was widely recognized that if London were to grow and prosper, a search for a dependable water source to meet its needs was vital for several reasons. The first was to provide London with a constant supply of fresh drinkable water as stated in a brief submitted by the London Medical Association to the London City Council on February 15, 1875.

...a supply of pure water is necessary to the sanitary condition of the city, and that the present supply of water from wells is, in very many localities dangerous to health, in consequence of the soil being porous and becoming gradually saturated with impurities from privies, cess-pools, stables, &c., thereby poisoning the water...<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the Medical Association had concluded “that a considerable portion of the sickness and mortality that have occurred in the city during the past year is traceable to impurities in the (well) water.” To rectify this problem, City Council was made aware of three fresh water springs adjacent to a woolen mill on the Thames owned by Charles Coombs. William Saunders, a chemist and local pharmacist, reported that the water from these springs was “entirely free from organic matter, nitrates of lead, iron and other unnatural

impurities, and when submitted to the highly magnifying power of a microscope, there is no appearance whatever of microscopic organisms.”<sup>2</sup> Not only was this water said to be superior “to the water from wells in various (other) parts of the city,” the amount produced by the streams on a daily basis (2,065,207 gallons) was also said to be sufficient to supply a city twice the size of London. Hence, of the many sites in and around London where water was available, this site was considered the best.

The second reason for seeking a dependable supply of water was the constant fear of fire. Between 1852 (which is the earliest year for which records are available) and 1875 London experienced 484 fires leading to a total financial loss of \$1,167,700.<sup>3</sup> Although many of the fires were minor, typically one major fire occurred nearly every year in and around the downtown area. In 1870, for example, many downtown commercial structures were lost.

The tinshop of I.W.C. Baker was burned January 5, 1870, entailing a loss of \$2,500. The other property destroyed (on January 5) was A. Johnston’s building, \$1,400; Hiscox’s Hotel, \$1,600; T. Powell’s furniture, \$500; Mrs. Trebilcock’s stock, about \$600; Goldner & Hooper’s, about \$300; Dr. Westland’s furniture, \$300;

and Benj. Higgin's building, \$300 –in all, \$7,500. The O'Callaghan and Elson frame building, which stood on Richmond Street, opposite the City Hall, was burned January 21....The fire on Duke and Cartwright Street, of February 22, destroyed property valued at \$2,000. The grocery store of Michael Gleeson, on Richmond and Bathurst Streets, was destroyed by fire, February 27....The petroleum works of Englehart & Company on Adelaide Street, were destroyed by fire, February 24....A second explosion at Englehart's on April 9, entailed a loss of \$2,000; and a third on May 23, 1870, damaged property valued at \$6,000. Macmillan & Latham's oil still exploded August 11.<sup>4</sup>

While London's property owners were clearly concerned over their personal losses as the result of fire, it was also widely recognized that if London did not develop an effective firefighting system, this could severely hamper the city's competitive edge in fostering future growth. By 1875 Hamilton, Windsor, Toronto, and Ottawa all had established effective waterworks systems for extinguishing fires, which meant that each of these cities would have a major advantage over London in attracting businesses and manufacturing enterprises. The London city engineer, arguing in favour of developing a similar system for London, addressed this matter in the following way.

...if large stocks of valuable goods may be held as safe from the ravages of fire as elsewhere, and at the lowest rates of insurance, London may become the depot for many a new establishment which otherwise would go elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>

The system he recommended was similar to that found in many neighbouring communities, i.e., water from a natural flowing source would be delivered through a pumphouse to a reservoir located at or close to the top of a nearby hill. The water stored in the reservoir would then be released through a gravity flow system to hydrants located throughout the downtown area. According to a report by the city engineer, Hungerfort Hill (also known as Chestnut Hill and today as Reservoir Park), was directly opposite the springs on Coombs' property, and was 270 feet (82.29 metres) above the surface of the Thames River. Because this elevation exceeded by more than 150 feet (45.72 metres) the highest elevation in and around the downtown area, it was anticipated that water from the reservoir would reach the city under sufficient pressure to activate fire hoses attached to the hydrants. In short, the springs on Coombs' property were said to satisfy both the needs of the citizens for a drinkable source of water and the needs of the city to provide adequate fire protection to the downtown stores, shops and hotels, and even to some of London's private residences. What was required before this proposal could be enacted, however, was approval from the residents in the form of a bylaw to endorse the necessary financing.

Despite the reasonable nature of this proposal, it took three referenda for the bylaw to pass. Meanwhile, London continued to burn.

### The First Referendum

On February 22, 1875 the City Council approved a bylaw that contained the following main provisions.<sup>6</sup>

- 1) That water-works for the city of London shall...be constructed, managed and maintained by and through the agency of Commissioners.
- 2) That for the purpose of construction...the mayor (shall) raise by way of loan...the sum of four hundred thousand dollars...though debentures...that shall bear interest of seven percent per annum...payable half yearly in each and every year.
- 3) (In order to retire this debt) an annual special rate of five mills and seven-tenths of a mill on the dollar shall be levied and collected, in addition to all other rates in each year from the first issue of the debentures...upon all rateable property in the said city.

In the weeks leading up to the referendum all of the arguments in favour of the need for clean water and effective fire protection appeared in a four page broadside which was widely distributed by the London City Council. Although both the *London Free Press* and the *Daily Advertiser* were strongly in support of some form of waterworks scheme, the

debate that ensued was acrimonious and highly divisive.

Prior to the referendum held on March 29, 1875, and in addition to the broadside, City Council ordered the complete bylaw to be published in the city papers for one month. City Council also held open meetings in each of the seven wards to fully inform the citizens about the nature of the undertaking. For the majority of citizens the major issue was the overall expense versus the overall benefit of fire and health protection. Throughout the month, summaries of the meetings appeared in both newspapers along with letters, largely from irate citizens who expressed considerable anger over the need for this undertaking.

The major points raised in opposition to the bylaw surfaced during the first open meeting which was held on March 4<sup>th</sup>. Since the city debt was already \$1, 150, 787<sup>6</sup> many voiced the opinion that this proposed expense of \$400,000 would increase the debt by nearly 35%. In addition, the proposed increase in property taxes was also said to be excessive since it was doubtful if home owners in all of the wards would benefit equally from the proposed fire protection scheme because of the distances of their homes from the downtown core. Closely related to these two points was a disbelief in the lack of purity of well water. Because of this disbelief, it was also argued that since the major need was for water to extinguish fires, river water would suffice and could be obtained at a far lower cost. The following letter from W.Y. Brunton is one example of the arguments that frequently appeared in the *Advertiser*.

My taxes are now fifteen dollars per foot per annum, frontage. Should the by-law...receive a majority of votes in its favour instead of fifteen dollars they will be twenty-one. I am not opposed to waterworks, quite the contrary; but I am thoroughly opposed to the present scheme. I have no hesitation in saying that we can get a full supply of water for fire and household purposes, drinking water excepted, for less money than is required by "Coombs Pond," by adopting the same system that the Great Western Railway has, viz, pumping it from the river.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, Fred S. Wilkes from Branford, Ontario had submitted the following proposal that relied on water from the Thames River at Dundas Street.

We estimate for two engines, two boilers, two pumps... fifty double anti-freezing fire hydrants...(along with a) building suitable for machinery and an engineer to reside in, all set up and put in complete operation and warranted capable of throwing eight good efficient fire streams for \$55,000.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the positive response that was initially anticipated by Council, in an address before Council on March 11, the mayor summarized the negative

experiences that he encountered when he addressed the Ward 2 rate payers during a meeting held the night before.

His Worship said that during the whole of the time he had filled the civic chair, he had never been so abused as he had been at that meeting; he felt that men who ought to have known better, had grossly insulted the board over which he presided. The entire burden had been thrown on his shoulders; and he now wished the council to say what action they would take in the matter—whether it would be advisable or not to withdraw the by-law for the present.<sup>9</sup>

The reason for suggesting that the bylaw be withdrawn was that if the bylaw were defeated, it could not be brought up again for one year. In spite of the risk of defeat Council allowed the referendum to stand. Given the level of opposition, however, it is not surprising that when the referendum was held on March 29<sup>th</sup>, an overwhelming majority voted against the bylaw. Across all seven wards, 699 votes were cast against while only 243 votes were cast in favour.<sup>10</sup> In commenting on this matter the *Free Press* summarized the outcome in the following way. "...so many of the voters seem to have thought that, as they have wells in their back-yards, there is no need of water-works...Many have said (however) that they are in favor of such works as might do duty in case of fire...but such works can be had for far

less than \$400,000, and if they can, why ask us to vote so large a sum?...the feeling behind this (claim) is that if the money is once voted, it will be spent, no matter what.”<sup>11</sup>

As mentioned above, with the defeat of the bylaw the city was prevented from issuing another for at least one year. What occurred during this interval? Not unexpectedly, and beginning in April, throughout the first four months following the defeat, London experienced a number of fires. On April 16 Andrews’ Brush Factory located on Richmond Street south of Kent was destroyed. “Mr. Andrews’ stock, tools and furniture were totally destroyed, entailing a loss of at least two thousand dollars, upon which there is an insurance of one-half that amount.”<sup>12</sup> The next morning a fire occurred in a grocery store at the corner of Horton and Ridout where “the stock of groceries and furniture is almost (a) total loss...(Although) valued at nine hundred dollars, (they were only) partially covered by an insurance of five hundred dollars.”<sup>13</sup> Then on April 26 a building in Victoria Park that previously had served as officer’s quarters when the regiment was stationed in London and now housed ten families, burnt to the ground.<sup>14</sup>

And so it went: in May there were eight fires, including one in the third story of the Bank of British North America and in the Ramsey and Sleightholm planning mill and sash factory near the Grand Trunk Station. Then in June there were 12 more, and in July 11 others. In fact the situation had become so bad that *The London Evening Advertiser*, in an editorial at the end of May, stated that “London is now being visited by an

epidemic of fire, and the question of how long it is going to last is one which, though full of interest, is more easily asked than answered.”<sup>15</sup> Clearly, London was in a desperate situation.

How did the city cope with this situation? Up to this point London relied on water placed in brick tanks that measured two by five meters sunk three meters in the ground at various locations throughout the city. In total there were approximately 64 water tanks in London but only about 40 per cent were said to be in good condition. Because the covers were made of wood, many had rotted, were in danger of caving in when driven over by teams of heavy horses, and were condemned as unreliable.<sup>16</sup>

Water from the tanks was delivered through hoses attached to pumps mounted on fire engines that were brought to the scene of a fire. The major drawback with this procedure was that, since the tanks were not water tight, they “had to be filled regularly as the level could drop by as much as one meter in a day.” If the tanks ran dry and nearby wells were not available before the fires were extinguished the buildings would burn to the ground. Thus, the major protection against loss was to remove all of the flammable contents before the buildings were engulfed in flames.

Upon the occasion of a fire, no cry can be more afflictive or suggestive than that of ‘no water,’ yet upon the recurrence of every fire in this city the same cry is repeated until a fatal apathy as to results seems to have set in....The precarious supply provided by

(the tanks), the pumps and the wells only suggests the necessity of more adequate provision, and beyond these puny resources, none whatever exists.<sup>17</sup>

### The Second Referendum

Needless to say, all of the members of City Council were very aware of the need to secure a more dependable supply of water that could be delivered under constant pressure. Given the urgency associated with this need, it is quite surprising that Council did not address this matter as soon as possible, which would have been one year following the first referendum. Instead two years were allowed to pass before the issue was once again brought to the fore. Thus, on June 4, 1877, it was moved and carried:

...that this Council being of the opinion that the time has arrived when water-works should be introduced for general purposes and that the matter be referred back to the Fire, Water and Gas Committee for the purpose of bringing in a detailed statement of the different schemes that may be submitted to them, giving the number of hydrants, location of the same, and number of miles of piping in the city, for the approval of this Council.<sup>18</sup>

After giving careful consideration to all of the arguments advanced by those who opposed the 1875 bylaw, on July 9, the committee submitted a full report to council that began with the following information.

Your Committee were authorized by resolution of Council to prepare a cheap and efficient scheme for water works, that would meet present necessities and be acceptable to the ratepayers...For this the works at Hamilton, Brantford, St. Catharines, Sarnia, Port Huron, Detroit and Windsor were visited...and thoroughly investigated...(It was therefore concluded that) the engine house and pumping apparatus be built at the west end of Dundas street and water supply to be taken from the north branch of the River Thames sufficiently far north to get the sole supply from that branch...and that further delay on the part of Council in this matter would be esteemed by all concerned in the welfare and protection of the city as little else than criminal.<sup>19</sup>

The final bylaw that went to the public for approval on August 22 contained the following main provision: "That the amount of the debt intended to be created by the construction of the said Waterworks is the sum of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars...to be raised by the issue of Waterworks Debentures...paid for through general taxation."

As was the case with the previous bylaw, this provision and the new recommendation were both printed in the newspapers during the month preceding the referendum and public meetings were also held throughout the city to discuss the referendum. Although

once more City Council felt that it had addressed the needs of the citizens, the following letter that appeared in the *Advertiser* on August 10 summarized the major arguments voiced by many who opposed this second bylaw.

To me and to many others as well, judging from the expressions of opinion of those around me, the arguments and assertions in support of the scheme were far from satisfactory. It was admitted from the outset that the proposed plan was for a temporary supply for fire and manufacturing purposes only, and that at some future time it would of necessity have to be extended so as to meet the demand for domestic consumption. This partial, temporary scheme, however, which will benefit only the centre of the city where the manufacturers are located and the greatest danger from fire exists, (why) must (the cost) be shouldered by the entire community.<sup>20</sup>

The writer also drew attention to the fact that the water level in the Thames does not remain constant throughout the year, "...as anyone will admit who will take the trouble to look at the dry, stony bed of the river at this season of the year, when an ample supply of water is most needed...the water is under the stones and is hidden from view." In other words, if the Thames could only be depended on to supply an ample amount of water during certain seasons, the city would be no better off than when it

relied on brick tanks to provide the necessary water.

The *Free Press* also condemned the present scheme and, along with the ratepayers in Ward 6 together with many others, called for the withdrawal of the bylaw. "It would be far better to do that than to throw the whole idea over for (still) another year. No one denies that waterworks are badly needed, imperatively required, but the contention is that the present scheme submitted by the Council is an ill-advised one."<sup>21</sup>

On August 20, Council received a resolution from Ward 6 together with a petition from "James Rogers and over 200 others, asking the Council to withdraw the waterworks bylaw and substitute the Coombs' scheme instead."<sup>22</sup> During the course of the meeting many of the counsellors spoke on behalf of the petition. At the end of the discussion, the petition was approved and the second bylaw was withdrawn. Although the *Advertiser* was also strongly in favour of the move to withdraw, the next day in a lead editorial the *Advertiser* published an extremely caustic assessment of Council's overall role in first promoting this venture, then supporting its demise.

The exhibition last night at the Council Board was the culmination of municipal imbecility...we have now seen a real Mayor and Council displaying a helplessness and incompetency unparalleled, and that upon a subject as well understood by men of ordinary education as the erection of a house or the building of a bridge. We did not enter largely into the

discussion of the waterworks question, nor did we fill our columns with matter relating to it. It was a good opportunity to let the people display their superiority to the men who are ambitious to govern them.<sup>23</sup>

Needless to say, City Council was extremely upset over the editorial and during its next regular session (August 27) stated that the editorial writer “with his characteristic meanness, fairly outrivals himself in deliberate falsehood and low, scurrilous abuse...” With these thoughts in mind, Council resolved that:

...to maintain its dignity as a corporation, and assert their individuality and independence as public men and as citizens, and resent the false aspersions and mean insinuations levelled at the Council generally and the Chairman of the Fire, Water and Gas Committee in particular, and that we demand a full and ample apology from the writer; and if this reasonable demand be not complied with the Editor of said *Daily Advertiser* will forfeit the confidence of this Council, as a public journalist and as an honorable man, and that we cease to have any communication with him in a business capacity, or otherwise as a corporation.<sup>24</sup>

The motion was carried, with only one exception. Since the *Advertiser* did not comply with Council’s request, this marked the beginning of a bitter feud between

Council and the *Advertiser* that lasted throughout the next referendum.

### **The Third Referendum and the feud between City Council and the *Advertiser***

Because the motion approved by Council on August 20 called for a bylaw that included the Coombs’ scheme, the Chair of the Fire, Water and Gas Committee once again submitted to the public and Council all of the elements in the original bylaw, with one main exception. In the 1875 bylaw it was estimated that the overall cost of the waterworks would be \$400,000 whereas now it was estimated that the overall cost would be \$325,000.<sup>25</sup> This \$75,000 difference resulted from a drop in the price of materials and a drop in the cost of labour between 1875 and 1877.<sup>26</sup> Despite the lower cost in this third bylaw, water would still be pumped from Coombs’ springs to a reservoir at the top of Hungerfort Hill where it would be stored. When needed, the water would be fed through pipes to the city where it could be accessed through hydrants for fire protection and in homes for domestic use. The referendum was scheduled to be held on December 14, 1877.

In the 1870s notices of public meetings to be held by the City were placed in local papers in the form of paid advertisements. Since Council had refused to have any communication with the editor of the *Advertiser* in a “business capacity,” this meant that Council would no longer insert paid advertisements in the *Advertiser* but instead would confine these to the *Free Press*. The *Advertiser* resented this position by Council and addressed the matter in several editorials that were obviously written in considerable anger.

A meeting to discuss the waterworks scheme will be held tonight in the Colborne Street School House in No. 5 Ward. We give this notice gratuitously that the ratepayers may know that the meeting is to take place. It might be well for someone to explain why the numerous property owners and tax-payers who read only the *Advertiser* should be slighted and insulted by being kept in the dark as to meetings related to important additions to the city debt—meetings advertised in other papers at the expense of the very ratepayers so slighted and insulted.<sup>27</sup>

We would have the small-potato majority of the present Council know that the *Advertiser* has the right to the (paid) advertisement and a right to ask for it, and to demand the reason for its refusal. We ask no favors at (Council's) hands. In a week or two (when the next election is called many of the current members) will disappear from the scene, unwept, unhonoured and unsung. Because the *Advertiser* chooses to oppose their absurd and trumpery scheme, got up as much as anything to create places for one or two of their number, it is to be punished, forsooth, by being refused the official announcement which is to tell electors where to record their votes, and what they are to vote on!<sup>28</sup>

The *Advertiser* then chose to further retaliate by opposing the bylaw itself. To fully appreciate the nature of the *Advertiser's* opposition to this third bylaw it may be helpful to review the *Advertiser's* extremely positive reactions when the same bylaw was introduced in 1875. The following examples are typical of the laudatory comments that appeared in the *Advertiser* prior to the first referendum held in March, 1875.

We have the most positive assurances of the promoters of the scheme that the entire cost will fall short of the \$400,000 asked for in the by-law...<sup>29</sup>

There are sound and substantial arguments in favor of the conclusions of the Council and nothing to sustain the opposite contention except an illusory and shadowy pretense of economy which would vanish with the adoption of the scheme. All who inhabit, or whose daily employment forces them to spend the major part of the day in the centre of the city must admit that pure water for drinking and cooking, is as much a necessity in its way in the locality referred to, as water for fire and other public purposes.<sup>30</sup>

We hear names mentioned in connection with the Commissionerships that should satisfy the public that no extravagance or jobbery will mark the construction of the works, and

that the wishes of those who elect them will be scrupulously attended to.<sup>31</sup>

In sum, throughout the period leading up to the first referendum, the *Advertiser* never requested any information on the origin or the accuracy of Council's initial cost estimate. It was also willing to trust Council's original claim that the final cost would be less than the estimated cost, and that the Commissioners who would be charged with making the final decisions were all trustworthy and dependable individuals.

In sharp contrast to their overall approval in 1875 of the first bylaw, when addressing this third bylaw in 1877, the *Advertiser* now found considerable reason to question what was, in reality, the same information presented by Council in 1875. As the following examples illustrate, It now disputed the trustworthy nature of the people who would serve as Commissioners, the accuracy of the tax burden that would result from the new estimated expense, and the nature of the expense itself.

(Council) should call for actual tenders from responsible parties for the necessary supplies of material and the due performance of the work required. These, with the sums necessary for purchase of site, right of way, etc., would give reliable data upon which an estimate of the cost could be based. People would then know what they are called upon to vote in the way of additional taxes—a thing that is now a mere matter of guess-work.<sup>32</sup>

We want the insertion of the names of the Commissioners who are to handle and spend the people's money. The persons who are currently named as probable Commissioners are not to be trusted. The insertion of the names as Commissioners of persons in whose honesty the taxpayers can have confidence would add enormously to the strength of the scheme and its likelihood of being carried.<sup>33</sup>

We learn from the *Hamilton Spectator* that Hamilton expended originally \$850,000 for waterworks. This sum paid for a complete system, including engines, filtering basin, reservoir, &, with about seventeen miles of pipes. And yet the people of London are told that they can build a system of waterworks, with thirty miles of pipes, for (only) \$325,000.<sup>34</sup>

There is no mistaking public sentiment on the above points. It is safe to say that three-fourths of the ratepayers are determined by one or other of the reasons quoted to vote down the present by-law, and all that is necessary to ensure its overwhelming defeat is that all opposed to it make it a point to cast their ballots at the polls tomorrow. The only hope the schemers have of carrying the by-law is that the opposition will not be sufficiently aroused to turn out and vote.<sup>35</sup>

With these key points in mind the *Advertiser* then urged its readers to vote against the bylaw. It is obvious that this advice, which appeared in a number of editorials throughout the period leading up to the third referendum, had little to do with the bylaw itself but instead merely reflected the *Advertiser's* anger over Council's refusal to deal with the *Advertiser* in a "business capacity" unless the *Advertiser* apologized for its intemperate remarks following the second referendum. In contrast to the way the *Advertiser* addressed the third bylaw, it is important to mention that The *Free Press* in its editorials not only encouraged its readers to vote in favour of the bylaw, as the following examples show, but also took issue with much of the advice that appeared in the *Advertiser*.

The largest property holders in the city—those who pay the major portion of the taxes—and the electors who desire to see London prosper, are strong advocates of the scheme submitted. The manufactures are, with two exceptions, in its favour, and in a word, the men who have made London what it is, and who have been foremost in enterprises having for their object the advancement of the city's interests, are the men who ask their fellow-electors at this time to assist in the passage of a measure which is calculated to enhance the property of every ratepayer in the city.<sup>36</sup>

We may economize by refusing to expend the sum mentioned in the by-law, and before a year is over we may have occasion to curse such

short-sighted economy and regret that we followed the advice of such counsellors when it is too late...Every man who respects himself will regret the abuse that has been heaped upon the members of the Council, the insults that have been offered them, and the insinuations that have been indulged in respecting this scheme, when every elector ought to know that as the Board of Aldermen are unanimously of the opinion that water-works are a necessity, and that the present is the very best scheme in their power to offer... It may seem strange to call upon those qualified to vote today to think for and of others as well as themselves...Anyone who contemplates the amount of human suffering that would be entailed upon the people of this city by a great fire, would shrink from incurring the responsibility involved in voting against this scheme...In a question of this breadth and importance, all should think of the city and its interests as well as of their individual interests.<sup>37</sup>

In view of these strongly opposing views, how did the people vote? Despite the onslaught of criticism leveled by the *Advertiser* at City Council and the bylaw, the arguments advanced by the *Free Press* did win the day, but only marginally. On December 14, 1877, 718 or 54 per cent voted in favour of the bylaw, while 612 or 46 per cent voted against.<sup>38</sup>

### Conclusion

With such a slim a margin of victory it is certainly possible that the outcome of this third referendum could easily have turned out quite differently. Because Council had put forward the only two options that were feasible at the time (Coombs' springs vs the river), if the bylaw had been defeated what might have happened next is impossible to know since no further waterworks bylaws were introduced until 1906, 1907, and 1908, and all of these were defeated. In fact, it wasn't until 1909 that a waterworks bylaw was finally ratified.<sup>39</sup>

In essence, without proper fire protection, and through the continued use of antiquated firefighting procedures, it goes without saying that over the years considerable harm could have been inflicted on London's fledgling manufacturing and business core. If this had happened, it is not inconceivable that a number of companies that subsequently located here might have refused to move to London and gone elsewhere instead. Hence, the long term impact of this rather petty controversy between London City Council and the *London Daily Advertiser* could have seriously hampered the city's growth and led to a smaller and a far less prosperous London than the one we know today.

### Postscript

Several months after the third bylaw was ratified, Council passed a further bylaw to cover the cost of construction. It agreed to issue a series of waterworks debentures in the amount of \$325,033.00 at an annual interest rate of 6 per cent, all of which were purchased at a discount of nearly 3 per cent by F. A. Fitzgerald, a

local businessman who was president and managing director of the Imperial Oil Company.<sup>40</sup> With the necessary funds now in hand, there was a growing sense of optimism among Council members. On May 6, 1878, Council unanimously approved a motion to establish a "special committee to take into consideration the advisability of offering some inducements to a certain class of manufacturers that we have not in this city (in order to encourage them to locate here)."<sup>41</sup> Needless to say, given the assurance that London would soon have a fire protection system comparable to those in Hamilton, Toronto, Ottawa, etc. the future prospects for the city finally began to look very bright, indeed.

The first step in the development of the waterworks system was to acquire the necessary land. Forty-eight acres surrounding Coombs' springs were obtained for the pumphouse along with approximately 23 acres that included the top of Hungerfort Hill for the reservoir. In addition, approximately three acres were obtained on the north side of the Thames for access to the pumphouse "from that side."<sup>42</sup> The 1878 map reproduced on page 34 shows the location of this property at the bend in the river along with the proposed pumphouse, reservoir, and pipeline from the reservoir to the city.

The next step involved construction. Work on the pumphouse began in 1878 and was finished in January, 1879. Made of stone, and in the shape of an Ontario Cottage,<sup>43</sup> the building measured 36 by 36 feet (10.9 by 10.9 metres), had an iron roof and floor girders of sufficient strength to hold machinery capable of pumping three million gallons of water per day to

the reservoir. Because the machinery required water power to operate, a 350 foot (106 metre) “crib dam” was also built across the river adjacent to the pumphouse. The dam was “constructed of piles framed together with timber filled in with stone and planked over...” The reservoir, completed around November 1, 1878, measured nearly 300 square feet (nearly 30 square metres) and, when filled to a depth of 14 feet (4.26 metres), held over 6,000,000 gallons (20,000,000 litres) of water.<sup>44</sup>

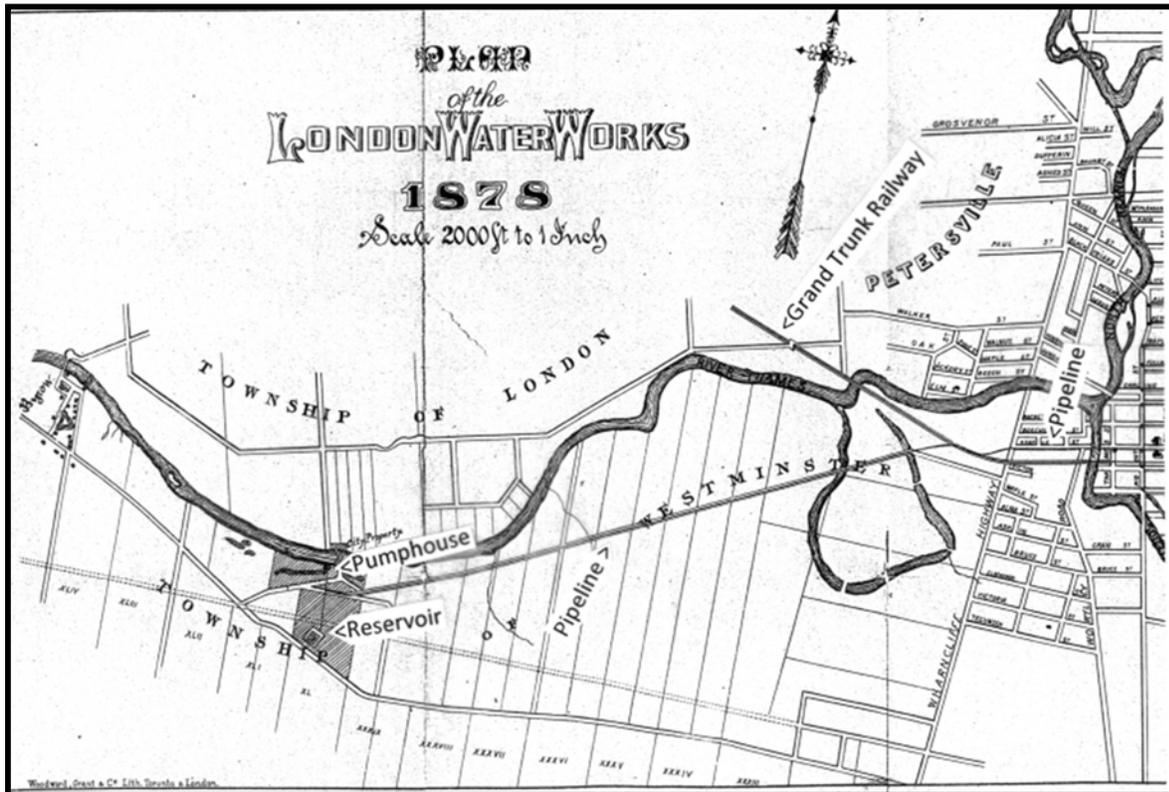
The photograph that also appears on page 34 shows the pumphouse and the adjacent crib dam. The building to the far right of the pumphouse is a second pumphouse built in 1881, and the only one still remaining on this site in Springbank Park.<sup>45</sup>

The map on page 35, which is a continuation of the previous 1878 map, shows that the proposed hydrants (depicted as black dots) were to be placed on almost every street corner in an area that stretched from Grosvenor Street in the north to Hill Street in the south, and from Thames Street in the west to Adelaide Street in the east. While the 1878 plan called for 180 hydrants, with installation to be complete by January, 1879, it was possible for private firms that required greater fire protection, to have further hydrants placed closer to their premises by paying a yearly rental fee of \$37.50 for each additional hydrant.<sup>46</sup> Over time, and as the need arose, more hydrants were added. By 1888, for example, 298 hydrants had been installed and by 1890, 59 additional hydrants were installed. It is also worth recalling that prior to 1878 the city only had about 64 water tanks for

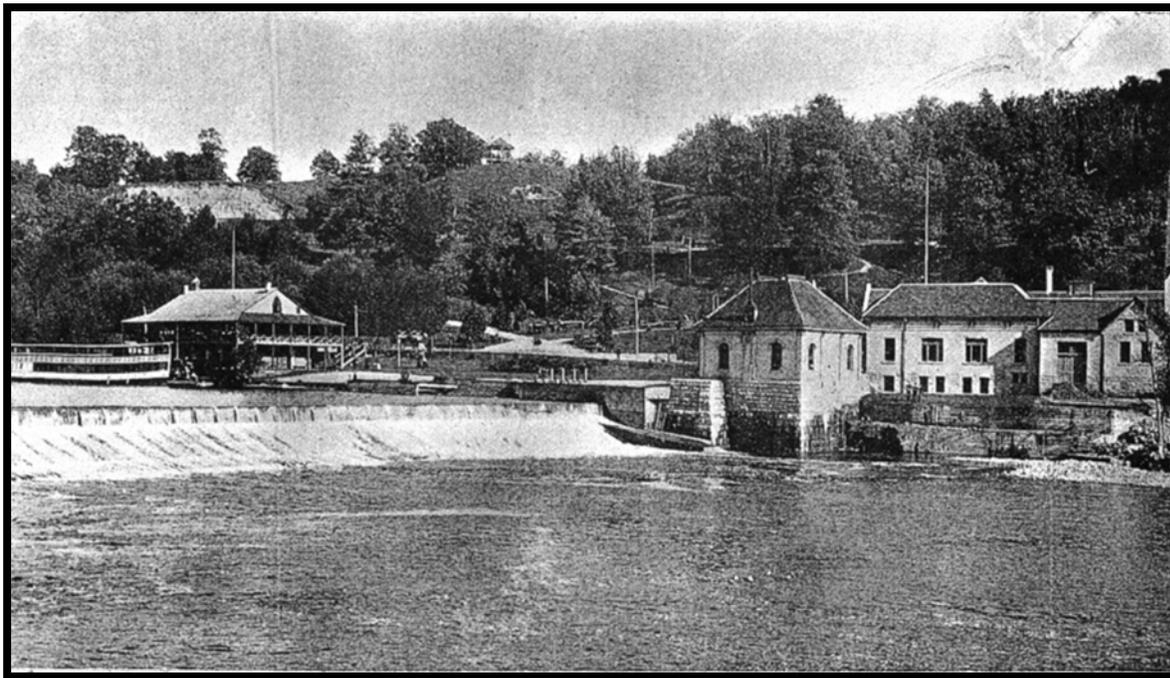
use in extinguishing fires (see page 23). Hence, by initially planning to install 180 fire hydrants, the city would have achieved a nearly three-fold increase in its firefighting capacity.

Based on the scale used to construct the 1878 map, it would appear that for water from the reservoir to reach the most distant hydrants, the water needed to travel approximately five to six kilometers and arrive at its final destination under sufficient pressure to extinguish a fire in a building at least two to three stories in height. Indeed, measurements made at the time revealed a water pressure of 76 to 92 pounds per square inch at the point of exiting the hydrants.<sup>47</sup> How was this feat accomplished? First, the water in Coombs’ springs was transferred to several nearby collecting ponds. From there it was pumped uphill through an 18 inch (42 centimetre) pipeline to the reservoir. The water was then fed when needed via gravity, from the reservoir through a series of progressively smaller pipes to the hydrants. Needless to say, the successful completion of this complex task must have represented a substantial engineering accomplishment in the late 1870s.

One question that immediately comes to mind, though, is how successful was the resulting system? The residents of London did not have long to wait for an answer. Recall that construction of all of the major components in the system was to be completed by January, 1879. Less than one month following this completion date Carling’s Brewery near Piccadilly, Ann and Talbot streets experienced a major fire. Fortunately, the firemen who arrived at the scene were able



*Plan of the London Water Works 1878. From the first annual report of the Board of Water Commissioners 1879. Courtesy of the London Room, London Public Library.*



*Photograph of pump house and crib dam. Courtesy of the London Room, London Public Library.*



Continuation of the Plan of the London Water Works 1878 (the black dots show the locations of the proposed fire hydrants; the numbers refer to city wards). Courtesy of the London Room, London Public Library.

to attach hoses to several nearby hydrants which were in good working order. As a result of this action, even though the building could not be saved, the blaze was extinguished.<sup>48</sup>

Clearly, if water from the hydrants had not been available, the firemen would have been forced to rely on water from the nearby water tanks which could easily have run dry given the size of the fire. Moreover, since that February was an extremely cold month, the water in these tanks would have been at least partially frozen, which would have delayed its use. Thus, without the hydrants it is quite possible that the flames from Carling's Brewery could easily have spread to the surrounding neighbourhoods leading, not only to the loss of other buildings, but also to the loss of lives. The *Free Press* had the following to say about this matter:

...happily, the supply from the waterworks was continuous, the pressure strong, and the stream poured upon the smoldering grain (inside the building) were heavy and effective in the highest degree. The reservoir system so frequently spoken of as being among the best for extinguishing fires, proved to be all that had been claimed for it on this occasion...<sup>49</sup>

Finally, in addition to fire protection and in order to encourage the domestic use of the water delivered through the pipelines, Council also installed connections from the main pipeline to individual residences, businesses, churches, hotels, offices, schools, etc. throughout the area covered by the fire hydrants at a cost to the city of \$10,409.93, but at no cost to the owners. The reason given for this expense was the expectation that the city would subsequently realize more than what

was needed to cover this initial cost from a series of annual water rates such as the following which were charged to the property owners (see the Water Commissioners report on June 30, 1879).

private dwellings not exceeding 3 rooms.....	\$5
each additional room.....	\$0.75
urinals in private dwellings.....	\$4.00
water-closets in private dwellings.....	\$3.50
lawn watering (2000 feet and under).....	\$4.00
boarding houses per room.....	\$1.50
barber shops, per chair.....	\$2.50
churches.....	\$5.00 to \$10.00
eating houses.....	\$15.00 to \$30.00
saloons.....	\$15.00 to \$25.00
schools, per bed.....	\$1.50

Although Council had estimated that the annual revenue from these rates would be about \$10,000, in actual fact the city earned substantially more on a yearly basis. By 1889 the annual income from the domestic use of this water had risen to \$42,813.41 and a mere six years later the city enjoyed a windfall profit of \$61, 133.49. While it is unknown if this use led to a decline in illness, as predicted, it is very clear from these figures that City Council had made a very wise decision indeed when it elected to connect the main pipeline to residences, business, etc. free of charge in order to encourage the use of pure, wholesome spring water in place of what was often said to be contaminated well water (see the City Council minutes from December 1, 1880 through November 30, 1881, and Council's revenue and expense reports for 1889 and 1895).

**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> City Council Proceedings, Feb. 15, 1875

<sup>2</sup> E.V. Buchanan, London's Water Supply: A History. London, ON: 1968, The London Public Utilities Commission, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> *London Free Press*, Feb. 7, 1879, p. 4, col. 3

<sup>4</sup> The London Fire Brigade History (1928). Published under the auspices of the London Firemen's Benefits and Pension Fund.

<sup>5</sup> W. Robinson & T.C. Keefer, The London Water Works, The Proposed Scheme, 1875, p. (Western Archives, Western University, TD227.L65 R62, 1875).

<sup>6</sup> City Council Proceedings, Feb. 22, 1875

<sup>7</sup> *London Evening Advertiser*, March 1, 1875, p. 1, col. 5.

<sup>8</sup> *London Evening Advertiser*, March 15, 1875, p. 1, col. 5

<sup>9</sup> City Council Proceedings, March 11, 1875

<sup>10</sup> *London Free Press*, Mar. 30, 1875, p. 4, col. 2

<sup>11</sup> *London Free Press*, Mar. 30, 1875, p. 2, col. 3

<sup>12</sup> *London Evening Advertiser*, April 16, 1875, p. 1, col. 6

<sup>13</sup> *London Evening Advertiser*, April 17, 1875, p. 1, col. 6

<sup>14</sup> *London Evening Advertiser*, April 26, 1875, p. 1, col. 6

<sup>15</sup> *London Evening Advertiser*, May 3, 1875, p. 1, col. 6

<sup>16</sup> *London Free Press*, Feb. 7, 1879, p. 4, col. 3; Council Proceedings, Feb. 24, 1879, p. 549.

<sup>17</sup> B. Adams, The History of the London Fire Department. London, ON: 2002, Published by the London Fire Department, p. 18

<sup>18</sup> City Council Proceedings, June 4, 1877

<sup>19</sup> City Council Proceedings, July 9, 1877

<sup>20</sup> *London Evening Advertiser*, August 10, 1877, p. 4, col. 4

<sup>21</sup> *London Free Press*, August 18, 1877, p. 2, col. 1

<sup>22</sup> City Council Proceedings, Aug. 20, 1877

<sup>23</sup> *London Daily Advertiser*, August 21, 1877, p. 1, col. 4

<sup>24</sup> City Council Proceedings, Aug. 27, 1877

<sup>25</sup> *London Daily Advertiser*, October 30, 1877, p. 3, col. 2

<sup>26</sup> *London Daily Advertiser*, November 13, 1877, p. 1, col. 5

<sup>27</sup> *London Daily Advertiser*, December 6, 1877, p. 1, col. 4

<sup>28</sup> *London Daily Advertiser*, December 11, 1877, p. 1, col. 4

<sup>29</sup> *London Evening Advertiser*, March 2, 1875, p. 1, col. 3

<sup>30</sup> *London Evening Advertiser*, March 5, 1875, p. 1, col. 1

<sup>31</sup> *London Evening Advertiser*, March 27, 1875, p. 1, col. 3

<sup>32</sup> *London Daily Advertiser*, November 10, 1877, p. 2, col. 2

<sup>33</sup> *London Daily Advertiser*, December 1, 1877, p. 1, col. 4

<sup>34</sup> *London Daily Advertiser*, December 5, 1877, p. 2, col. 1

<sup>35</sup> *London Daily Advertiser*, December 13, 1877, p. 1, col. 4

<sup>36</sup> *London Free Press*, December 12, 1877, p. 3, col. 5

<sup>37</sup> *London Free Press*, December 14, 1877, p. 2, col. 1

<sup>38</sup> *London Daily Advertiser*, December 15, 1877, p. 1, col. 6

<sup>39</sup> E.V. Buchanan, London's Water Supply: A History. London, ON: 1968, London Public Utilities Commission. P. 25-28.

<sup>40</sup> E.V. Buchanan, London's Water Supply: A History. London, ON: 1968, London Public Utilities Commission. P. 16.

<sup>41</sup> Council Proceedings, May 6, 1878, p. 910.

<sup>42</sup> E.V. Buchanan, London's Water Supply: A History. London, ON: 1968, London Public Utilities Commission. p. 16-17.

<sup>43</sup> Nancy Z. Tausky, Historical Sketches of London. Peterborough, ON: 1993, Broadview Press. p. 88.

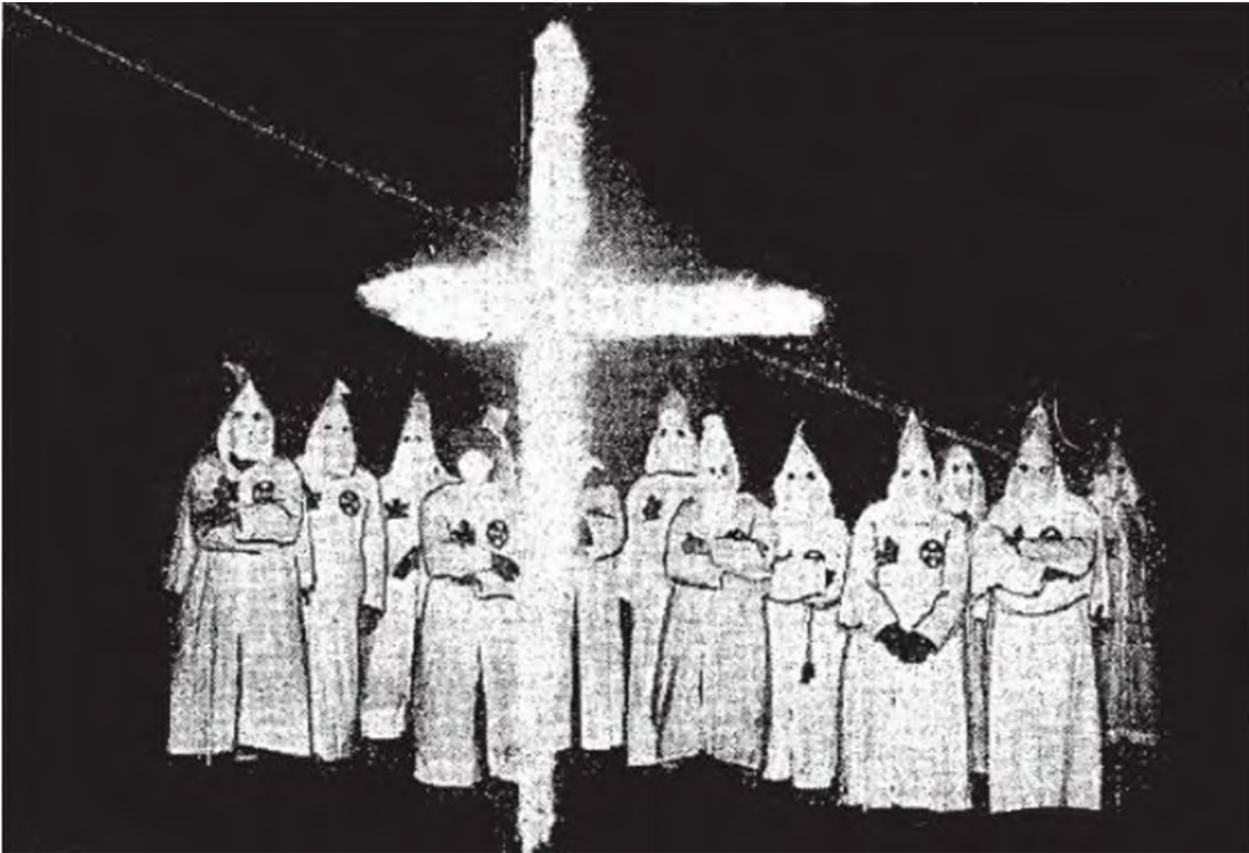
<sup>44</sup> E.V. Buchanan, London's Water Supply: A History. London, ON: 1968, London Public Utilities Commission. p. 20-21.

<sup>45</sup> In 1880 tenders were issued for the construction of a second pumphouse to serve as a backup facility in the event the first pumphouse was unable to function properly. Indeed, during the summer months the river often "lacked sufficient water to supply motive power for pumping..." and in 1883, as the result of a flash flood, one whole end of the first pumphouse was destroyed, though it was subsequently replaced (see Historical Series Scrapbook Vol. 1, p. 70, available in the London Room, London Public Library). When catastrophes such as these occurred, the second pumphouse was designed to operate on steam power through coal fired furnaces rather than through water power and could deliver nearly two million gallons (eight million litres) of water in 24 hours when needed. It is also worth mentioning that the first pumphouse was demolished in 1938.

<sup>46</sup> Council Proceedings, April 21, 1879, p. 563.

<sup>47</sup> E.V. Buchanan, London's Water Supply: A History. London, ON: 1968, London Public Utilities Commission. p. 20-21.

<sup>48</sup> *London Free Press*, February 13, 1879, p. 4, col. 3.



*A Klan ceremony in London, Ontario in late 1925 as featured in the London Advertiser. Ku Klux Klan robes in Canada differed from those in the United States by including a maple leaf opposite the cross insignia.*

## The Ku Klux Klan in London, Ontario<sup>1</sup>

John Lisowski

The Ku Klux Klan was founded on Christmas Eve, 1865, in Pulaski, Tennessee, by six white former Confederate Army officers,<sup>2</sup> after General Robert E. Lee had surrendered the Confederate Army at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865. The group's name is said to have been derived from the Greek word "Kuklos," meaning circle. It is believed that they added the word "Klan" in honour of their common Scottish ancestry, spelling the word "clan" with a "K" for alliterative effect. In 1915 the group re-named itself the "Knights of the Ku Klux Klan".

In its heyday during the 1920s the Ku Klux Klan claimed a national membership of more than six million, some in prominent positions. The group even claimed President Woodrow Wilson as a Klansman but his membership has never been conclusively proven. The claim is based on the fact that an excerpt from his book, *History of the American People*, which was first published in 1901, in which he wrote that "The white men were roused by a mere instinct of self-preservation...until at last there had sprung into existence a great Ku Klux Klan, a veritable empire of the South, to protect the Southern country," had appeared in D. W Griffith's movie, *Birth of a Nation*, originally named *The Clansman*. This sentiment is not surprising when one learns that Wilson grew up in a slave-owning household.

Allegedly intended as a social club, the Ku Klux Klan rapidly evolved into an instrument of terror when its members began to realize that their ghostly white robes, conical hoods and midnight cross-burnings terrified the local populace, especially some of the more superstitious blacks.<sup>3</sup> What started out as simple intimidation and property damage, quickly degenerated into violence – rape, pillage, beatings and murder. Although the Ku Klux Klan focused most of its attention on recently emancipated blacks, perceived "Negro-loving"

whites, usually white Republicans, were also targeted. Summary trials were held by the Ku Klux Klan and sentences imposed. In many instances victims were hanged without even the semblance of a farcical trial. Eventually the U.S. Government decided to step in. Faced with prosecution, imprisonment, and even execution for their crimes, many members of the Ku Klux Klan fled north to Canada. One of their destinations was London, Ontario, where a number of former expatriated political refugees from the South had settled. One such individual was Dr. James Rufus Bratton, a former South Carolinian.

Dr. Bratton, a member of an old and highly respected family, had practiced medicine in York County, South Carolina, for fifteen years before the attack on Fort Sumter across the water from Charleston launched the American Civil War. During the war he had served as a surgeon with the 5<sup>th</sup> South Carolina Volunteers, General Michah Jenkins Brigade. The passage of the Fourteenth Amendment<sup>4</sup> by the United States Government on July 8, 1868, resulted in a legislature a majority of whose members were recently freed Negro slaves. In effect, the slaves were now the masters. To most die-hard Southerners this was an abomination. Although throughout his sojourn in London, Dr. Bratton maintained he was not involved with the Ku Klux Klan, other sources tell a different story.

In his recent book, *Carpetbaggers, Cavalry and the Ku Klux Klan*, published in 2007, author J. Michael Martinez recounts how a Ku Klux Klan raid in 1871 led by Dr. Bratton ended with the lynching of James Williams, a black man.<sup>5</sup> James Williams was a former slave who had fled north but who had returned to South Carolina after the end of the Civil War and had been appointed Militia Captain for York County, South Carolina. In a speech he gave in the Town of Yorkville in March 1871, Williams had threatened that if the Ku Klux Klan ever came

into the county very few, if any, of its members would return home. Insulted by what they perceived to be disrespect for their organization, the Klansmen, led by Dr. Bratton, decided to show Williams and other “uppity” blacks in South Carolina that such threats would not be tolerated.

On March 6, 1871, an estimated 70 Klansmen arrived at the Williams home in the dead of night, led by Bratton who was 49 at the time. According to M.S. Carroll, a Klansman who subsequently wrote of the event in his journal, Williams was eventually found, after an extensive search, hiding under the floor boards of his home. With his terrified wife Rose looking on, the Klansmen dragged him out of his hiding place, put a rope around his neck and forced him to climb a nearby tree. Tying the rope to a limb some 10 or 12 feet above the ground, they tried to push him off to his death but he hung on, literally for dear life. Exasperated with the delay, one of the Klansmen, Robert Cladwell, climbed up the tree and began hacking at Williams’ fingers with a knife until he let go and plunged to an agonizing death by strangulation. Realizing that they would be hunted by federal law enforcement officers, Bratton and some of the other participants fled the state.

Bratton, travelling under the alias of James Simpson, arrived in London on May 21, 1872. He went to the home of Gabriel Manigault, a transplanted Southerner himself, on the east side of Alma Street, now a cul-de-sac, but which at that time was a one-block street between St. James and Grosvenor Streets immediately south of present-day St. Joseph’s Hospital. Unable to provide accommodation for Bratton in his small home, Manigault referred him to the home of Sarah Hill, a widow who lived on the west side of Wellington Street just south of Grosvenor.<sup>6</sup> He warned Bratton to be on the lookout for American agents who were known to frequently visit the city. Convinced he was now safe, other than maintaining his alias, Bratton failed to take any other precautions and walked freely about the city.

Exactly two weeks later, on the afternoon of June 4, 1872, at approximately 4:30 p.m., as eight-year-old Mary Alice Overholt was walking along Wellington Street just north of Grosvenor Street, she saw a man, later identified as Dr. James Rufus Bratton, emerge from the large gravel pit (present-day Doidge Park) that was located on the south-east

corner of Wellington and Cheapside Streets. She watched him approach a man who had alighted from a nearby cab driven by Robert T. Bates. Bates would later identify his fare as Isaac Bell Cornwall, London’s Deputy Clerk of the Peace, acting as an agent of Governor Scott of South Carolina.



*Dr. James Rufus Bratton*

He would describe how Bratton and Cornwall exchanged words and then the two men began to struggle with Cornwall ending up on top of Bratton. Another cab arrived on the scene shortly thereafter and a second man, later identified as an American detective named Joseph G. Hester, jumped out, helped Cornwall subdue and handcuff Bratton and force him into the cab. The little girl’s description of the kidnapping led authorities to conclude that chloroform had been used to subdue him. Edwin M. Moore, proprietor of the Tecumseh House which stood on the south-west corner of Richmond and York Streets, would later reveal that Hester had

registered at his hotel some six weeks earlier. Realizing even at her young age that something was definitely wrong, Mary Alice ran to the home of Euphemia Dixon on Wellington Street just north of Grosvenor and told her what she has seen. Mrs. Dixon hurried to her door just in time to see Cornwall force Bratton into Bates' cab and drive away. Bates was ordered to drive to Clarence Street south of the Grand Trunk (now Canadian National Railway) railway tracks. Because the train they intended to board was late, they had to wait approximately 45 minutes for it to arrive. Bates reported that he watched Cornwall lead Bratton onto the train, his hands still handcuffed, before driving away. It was learned later that Bratton was taken across the border into Detroit from where he was transported to South Carolina.<sup>7</sup>

News of the incident reached Ottawa where it was brought up in the House of Commons on June 11, 1872. Sir John A. Macdonald, the Prime Minister at the time, announced that he had communicated Canada's outrage at this violation of its sovereignty and had lodged complaints not only with the British Parliament in London, England, which allegedly led to Queen Victoria's personal intervention, but also with the office of the British Ambassador in Washington, D.C., accusing the United States Government of having failed to proceed through proper extradition channels as required by international law. Canada demanded Dr. Bratton's immediate release and return to Canada. Ironically, it was the very same laws that protected former black slaves who had fled to Canada from being returned to the United States. Anxious to defuse a politically dangerous international incident, the United States Government ordered Bratton's release. Bratton, in the meantime, had appeared before Judge Bryan on June 10, 1872, in a South Carolina court and was charged with participating in the raid that had ended with the lynching of James Williams in March 1871 and had been released on \$12,000.00 bond.

London Police arrested Isaac Cornwall and incarcerated him in the cells at the London Police Station. A preliminary hearing was held on June 13, 1872, at which Gabriel Manigault, Edwin M. Moore the former proprietor of the Tecumseh House, Sarah Hill with whom Bratton had lodged, Robert T. Bates the cab driver who had brought Cornwall to the gravel pit and the little girl, Mary Alice Overholt,

who had witnessed his abduction, all testified. At the conclusion of the hearing Cornwall, represented by W. H. Bartram, was committed for trial by Magistrate Laurence Lawrason. There is no indication whether he remained in custody or whether he was released on bail. George Walker, the conductor on the train which had carried Bratton to Detroit, revealed that the warrant Hester had produced was not for the arrest of Dr. Bratton but for the arrest of James William Avery, another South Carolinian from Yorkville.

Cornwall's trial began two days later before County Court Judge William Elliot. The courtroom was nearly filled with spectators. After cabbie Bates repeated his earlier evidence at the preliminary hearing and had left the stand, the Judge called for the next witness. The door opened and in walked a thin man of dark complexion, black hair and beard and standing five foot ten. To everyone's surprise, he turned out to be the kidnapped doctor himself. He had arrived in London the previous day. Dr. Bratton confirmed the known circumstances surrounding his kidnapping and then proceeded to tell the rest of the story. He stated that after arriving in Detroit he was taken to a Detroit Police Station where he was detained until midnight when he was taken by Hester to the railway station and placed on a train bound for Columbia, South Carolina. At the conclusion of Bratton's evidence, Judge Elliott sentenced Cornwall to three years imprisonment at Kingston Penitentiary for his role in the kidnapping, apparently not accepting his defence that he had been duped by Hester into assisting him to apprehend the wrong man.

Dr. Bratton was eventually joined by his wife and six children and continued to practice medicine in London for some years. He lived at 262 Piccadilly Street<sup>8</sup>, the third house on the north side of Piccadilly just west of Wellington Street,<sup>9</sup> which still stands, and maintained an office at 133 Dundas Street, later moving it to 194 Dundas Street. Throughout his stay in London he continued to deny any involvement in the Ku Klux Klan.

In a pamphlet entitled "*A Statement of Dr. Bratton's Case, being explanatory of The Ku Klux Prosecutions in the Southern States*," published in 1872, Dr. Bratton's London solicitors, Becher, Barker and Street, stated that they wished to dispel the "many idle rumors and false statements having

been put forth as to the charges against this gentleman.”<sup>10</sup> They insisted that Dr. Bratton was a political refugee and should not be “confounded with the ordinary fugitives from justice frequently escaping across the frontier.”<sup>11</sup> The pamphlet undoubtedly persuaded Londoners to view Dr. Bratton in a positive light. Since Canada prided itself on being a safe haven for fleeing slaves, given Dr. Bratton’s alleged membership in a group whose atrocities were well publicized, some have subsequently questioned why the good people of London would have continued to use his services. It appears that Londoners decided to overlook these allegations and instead chose to take advantage of the vast experience he had gained as a medical doctor and surgeon in the Confederate Army during the American Civil War under harsh and horrifying circumstances.



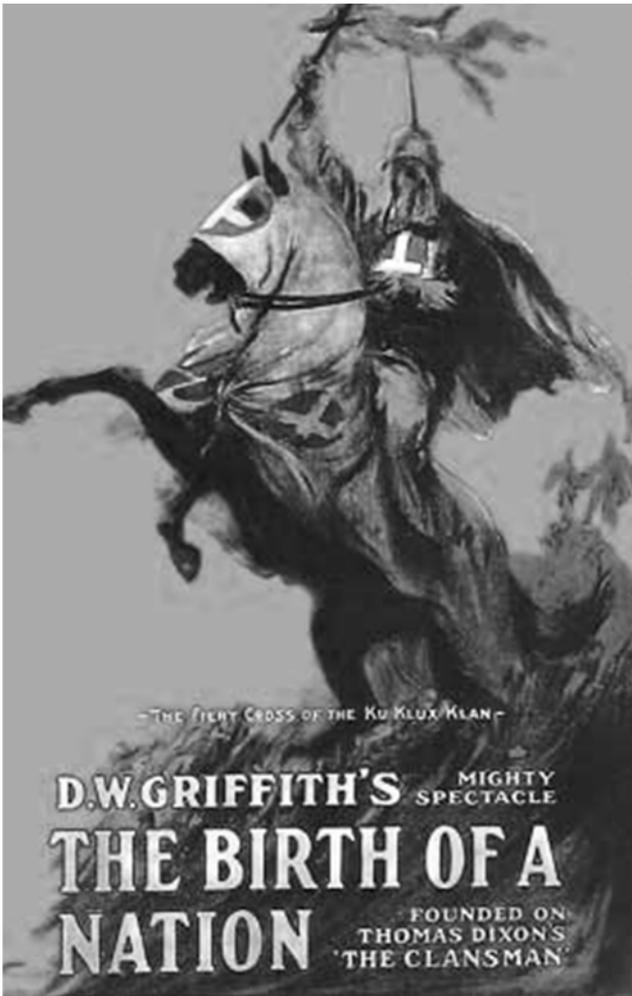
Mary Rebecca Bratton (Massey)

In addressing the allegation that Dr. Bratton had been present at the lynching of Captain James Williams, his solicitors pointed out that the Southerners were compelled to act against Williams not only because he had burned two small villages, Yorkville and Chesterville, but also because he had threatened “to Ku-Klux the white ladies and children.”<sup>12</sup> Although conceding that it had been proven in a South Carolina courtroom that during the night of March 5, 1871, a group of white men had in fact hanged Williams, they pointed out that no witnesses had come forth to identify Dr. Bratton as a participant in the hanging. They were obviously not aware of Carroll’s journal entries.

Dr. Bratton returned to South Carolina with his family sometime after 1879, the fact that President Ulysses S. Grant had granted amnesty in 1876 to former Klansmen probably having something to do with it.<sup>13</sup> He was never prosecuted for the lynching death of Captain Williams, very likely because of the prominence of his family and witnesses’ fear of retribution. Bratton died on September 1, 1897, in his 76<sup>th</sup> year and was buried in the Bethesda Presbyterian Church Cemetery in his home town of Yorkville, South Carolina. The *London Free Press* printed a tribute to him in its September 14, 1897 issue, recalling his stay in London in the 1870s and his prominence in Masonic activities in the city. The Bratton home was razed in 1956. A plaque erected at the site by the York County Historical Commission in 1977, commemorates the fact that Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy, spent the night of April 27, 1865 in the home on his flight from the Confederate capital at Richmond, Virginia, following the surrender of the Confederate Army.

Some believe that Dr. Bratton’s life was the inspiration for D. W. (David Wark) Griffith’s “*The Clansman*,” the first full-length motion picture ever made. The silent movie, which premiered on February 8, 1915, was based on Thomas Dixon’s novel *The Clansman*, and was explicitly racist. It glorified the supremacist views of the original Klan and undoubtedly revived and popularized the group. Much of the modern Klan’s symbols, rituals and dress, such as the white robes with the conical hat, as well as the burning of crosses were derived from the film, yet another example of life imitating art. Griffith defended his controversial film by saying he demanded “the liberty to show the dark side of

wrong, that we may illuminate the bright side of virtue.”<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, he changed the name of the film from *The Clansman* to *Birth of a Nation*, three months later. It is not surprising that the movie portrayed the South in a favourable light since Griffith’s father, Jacob Wark Griffith, a Kentucky Colonel who commanded the 1<sup>st</sup> Kentucky Cavalry in the Confederate Army during the Civil War, undoubtedly filled his son’s head “with nostalgic tales of dashing, gray-clad cavaliers defending the antebellum way of life.”<sup>15</sup>



Original movie poster 1915.

Not surprisingly, Southerners who were members of the Ku Klux Klan and who had emigrated to Canada, actively attempted to recruit new members to their “cause”. The Ku Klux Klan made a serious push to recruit new members in the London area in the years 1925 and 1926. The one and only attempt, at least the only overt one, to form

a London Klan took place in April 1925. Perhaps not surprisingly, no subsequent recruitment meetings were reported in local newspapers. After all, given the secrecy surrounding the group, new members may have been recruited at secret meetings that were not publicized. The *London Advertiser* quoted an unidentified London Police Officer as saying that “London would not tolerate such perpetrators as have been reported in Southern American cities. As soon as Ku Klux organizers present themselves in the city, they will be speedily apprehended.”<sup>16</sup> The *London Free Press*, however, quoted Chief Robert Birrell as saying that “We have no more right to interfere with their plans than we have to stop the organization of any other society. So long as they maintain order and in no way violate the laws of the land, they are at liberty to organize or hold meetings.”<sup>17</sup>

On April 23, 1925, The *London Advertiser* reported that the Ku Klux Klan of Kanada would hold its maiden meeting in the Ulster Hall, Duffield Block, south-west corner of Dundas and Clarence, at 8 p.m. that evening. Invitations to select individuals in London and area to attend the meeting and join the “brotherhood” had been posted in Toronto. Although The *London Advertiser* reported that a number of London’s Police Officers had been assigned to the Block to maintain order, the *London Free Press* again quoted Chief Birrell as saying police officers would not be assigned to the meeting for any reason.

A reporter for the *London Advertiser* gained admission to the meeting by presenting a card given to him by one of the persons who had received one of the invitations to attend the meeting. The motto at the top of the card, “NON SILBA SED ANTHAR”, means “Not for one’s self, but for others.” The following day he reported that only the man stationed at the innermost door to the meeting had been completely hooded in the well-known regalia of the Ku Klux Klan and that of the approximately 75 persons who had attended the meeting, only 50 paid the initiation fee of \$10. The unidentified chief speaker at the meeting, who claimed to be a minister and an ex-president of one of the leading universities in the United States, described the group as “racial, economic and religious, in that it seeks to maintain the purity of the white race, to wrest from the Jews the control of the economic situation, and to uphold Protestant

**The London Evening Free Press**  
 WESTERN ONTARIO'S FOREMOST NEWSPAPER  
 (11) WEATHER: Probabilities—Light Snow; Cold. LONDON, ONTARIO THURSDAY, JANUARY 21, 1926. —22 PAGES \*THREE CENTS

**FIRST CANADIAN KU KLUX BURIAL HERE**  
**CITY WILL FIGHT MOVE FOR HIGHER PHONE RATES** **WOODLAND SCENE OF CEREMONY BY KLAN**

**ACTION PLANNED TO HALT EFFORT**  
 Definite Steps To Be Taken After Session of Municipal Union At Ottawa.  
 ONTARIO ASSOCIATION LIKELY TO JOIN BATTLE  
 Matter Will Probably Be Deferred To Provincial Body By Dominion Group.

*The Klu Klux Klan Buries Its Dead*



**THREATEN TO UNSEAT SEVERAL ALDERMEN**  
 Ex-Residents Declare Vote On Busier Most Accompany One On Street Cars  
**CLAIM TWO LAWYERS HAVE BEEN ENGAGED**  
 Committee Appointed By Residents of District Adopt Policy of Watchful Waiting.

*Miss A. W. White Leaves Estate of \$77,506.00 To Sixteen of Relatives*  
 New Beneficiaries Live In City Free Necks Receive \$4,059 Each.

*Accepts Call*

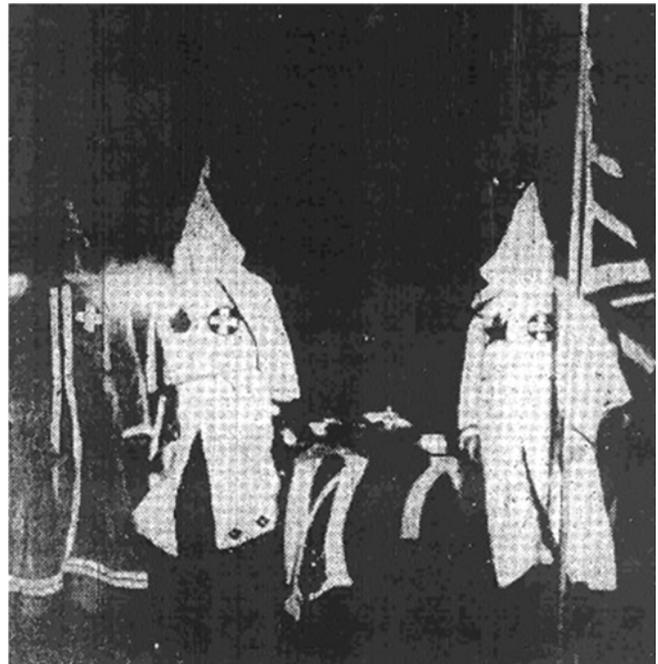


**First Ritual of Kind in Dominion Conducted At Funeral of Drambo Man.**  
**UNION JACK, FIERY CROSS, CARRIED TO GRAVESIDE**  
**Ceremony Witnessed Only By Relatives and Few Friends of Deceased.**  
 Attended by about fifteen of white and with one of their number bearing in its arms an electric light cross and another a Union Jack.

The London Evening Free Press headlines the first Canadian Ku Klux burial in London, Ontario.<sup>20</sup> Courtesy of Western Archives, Western University, London Free Press negatives collection.

principles as opposed to ‘the Roman Hierarchy’.<sup>18</sup> He claimed that the greatest sin, in the Klan’s judgment, was not murder or arson, but the “pouring of white blood into the veins of mud races.” Secrecy was considered essential so that the enemies of the Ku Klux Klan “did not know what we are doing, where we are doing it and how we are doing it.”<sup>19</sup>

Later that year, on August 2, 1925, at a rally of more than two hundred people on Federal Square<sup>21</sup>, Dr. J. H. Hawkins, claiming to be the Klan’s “Imperial Klailiff,”<sup>22</sup> proclaimed the beliefs of the Kanadian Klan: “We are a white man’s organization and we do not admit Jews and colored people to our ranks. God did not intend to create any new race by the mingling of white and colored blood, and so we do not accept the colored races.”<sup>23</sup> In Canada, the Klan, although still targeting blacks, also denounced Jews, Roman Catholics and immigrants. One of the Klan leaders, Dr. C. W. Fowler, a former New Yorker, addressed the crowd, saying, among other things, that the Klan’s “three chief purposes are to keep the white race pure, to strive for the economic betterment of the Gentiles and to work for the organization of Protestants in behalf of Protestant civilization.”<sup>24</sup> He insisted that the Klan did not take the law into its own hands,



The Klan gathering at the Dorchester fairgrounds, on the left is the imperial Kleigrapp, gowned in purple with gold braid. The other two are King Kleagles, distinguished by their scarlet hoods. On the front of the robes with the cross are maple leafs which distinguish the Kanadian Klan. London Free Press, Oct. 15, 1925. Courtesy of Western Archives, Western University, London Free Press negatives collection.

saying “How else than by legislation can we successfully obtain our ends?”<sup>25</sup> An estimated sixty Klan policemen were on hand to ensure the crowd behaved in an orderly fashion.

On August 3, 1925, the *London Free Press* quoted London’s Mayor, George Wenige, as saying, “London needs no Ku Klux Klan or other order that seeks to gain unjust ends by a cowardly parade of masks and mystery. As Mayor of London, I will use all the power of my office to rid the city of the verminous missionaries of an order that seeks to terrify citizens who may differ from these so-called Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in race, colour, religion, or ability to succeed.”<sup>26</sup> Two London Police Officers had attended but did not intervene as the meeting went off without incident. Oddly, the meeting concluded with a prayer to Allah, “May the peace of Allah rest upon you.”

On October 15, 1925, the *London Advertiser* revealed that more than 1,000 men and women from all over Western Ontario, some in white hoods and some simply wearing masks, had attended the first open air gathering by the Ku Klux Klan in Canada at the Donnybrook Fairgrounds in Dorchester the previous evening. A reported one hundred new candidates were sworn in as new members. Four crosses, varying in size from a small crossbar to one 50 feet in height with a 15-foot crossbar, were set afire.

The following year, on January 21, 1926, the headline in the *London Free Press* announced that what was believed to have been the very first time in Canadian history that members of the Ku Klux Klan had attended the burial services of one of its members and performed the last rites, had taken place in London, Ontario, the previous day. The paper reported that more than twenty robed and hooded members of the Ku Klux Klan of Kanada had attended the funeral of Alexander Milliken, a member of the Drumbo Klan, at Woodland Cemetery in London. Milliken had been previously employed as a watchman at the Canadian Pacific Railway Richmond Street crossing in London. They marched in single file around the open grave, led by the King Kleagle<sup>27</sup> carrying an electric fiery cross<sup>28</sup> and a sword, singing the well-known hymn “Nearer My God to Thee.” After saluting the Union Jack they dispersed. Only family and a few close friends were allowed to attend.

The following year a group of hooded Klansmen tried to proceed en masse through the

chapel of the Hyatt Avenue United Church in London to show their appreciation for the anti-Catholic sentiment earlier expressed by Rev. B. (Benny) C. Eckhardt, a lay preacher from Nilestown.<sup>29</sup> The Rev. R.J. McCormick refused to allow the Klansmen entry into the church unless they first removed their hoods and gowns.

An earlier suspected but never proven incident of Klan activity in London was the burning of the Harrison home in South London. Thomas Harrison and his wife Isabella were runaway slaves, he from Kentucky, she from Missouri, who had arrived in London, Ontario, via the underground railway, where they met and eventually married in 1854. The family’s home, where Richard Berry Harrison, their fourth son, was born on September 29, 1864, was located on the west side of Wellington Street just north of the South Branch of the Thames River.

Richard Harrison first became interested in the theatre when he was given a job selling copies of the *London Advertiser*, an early London newspaper, outside the city’s theatres. This gave him an opportunity to speak with some of the actors



Richard Harrison on Clark’s Bridge gazes at the location where his family’s former home stood.<sup>30</sup>



Copy of The Freedom of the City certificate given to Richard Harrison by the City of London, on October 29, 1934 when he was honoured by the City and appeared as the guest of honour at the London Rotary Club luncheon.

**Non Silba Sed Anthar**

**BELIEVING IN THE PRINCIPLES ANNOUNCED BELOW, AND WISHING TO AFFILIATE MYSELF WITH REAL PATRIOTS OF LIKE FAITH AND CONVICTIONS, I HEREBY REQUEST FULL INFORMATION REGARDING THE PATRIOTIC ORDER WHOSE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES ARE NAMED BELOW AND ALSO REQUEST AN INTERVIEW.**

- |                              |                                       |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Protestantism                | Freedom of Speech and Press           |
| White Supremacy              | Selective and Restrictive Immigration |
| Gentile Economic Freedom     | Law and Order                         |
| Just Laws and Liberty        | Higher Moral Standard                 |
| Pure Patriotism              | Our Public Schools                    |
| Separation of Church & State | Freedom from Mob Violence             |

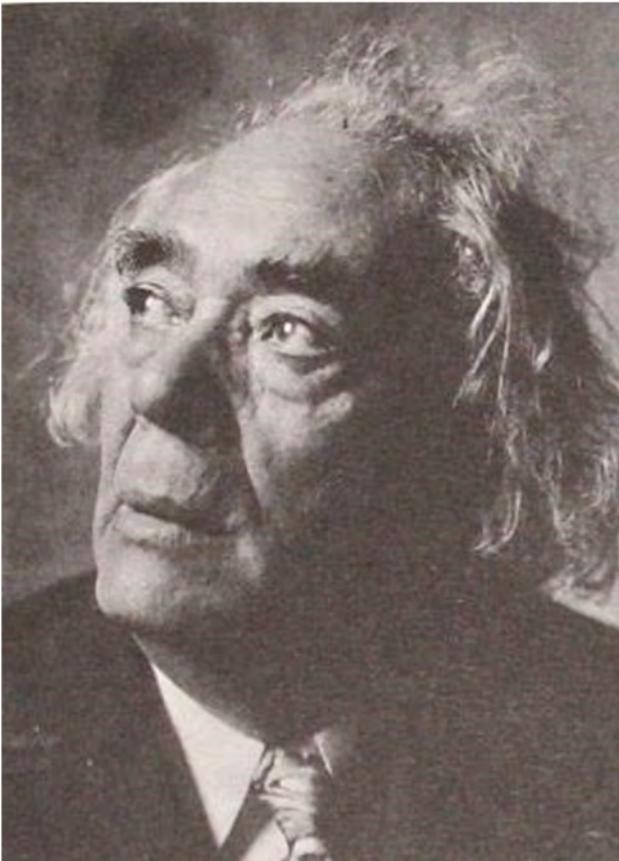
**NAME** .....  
**ADDRESS** .....  
**ST. NO.** ..... **PHONE NO.** .....

**I AM A WHITE, GENTILE, PROTESTANT, AND WILL BETRAY NO CONFIDENCE.**

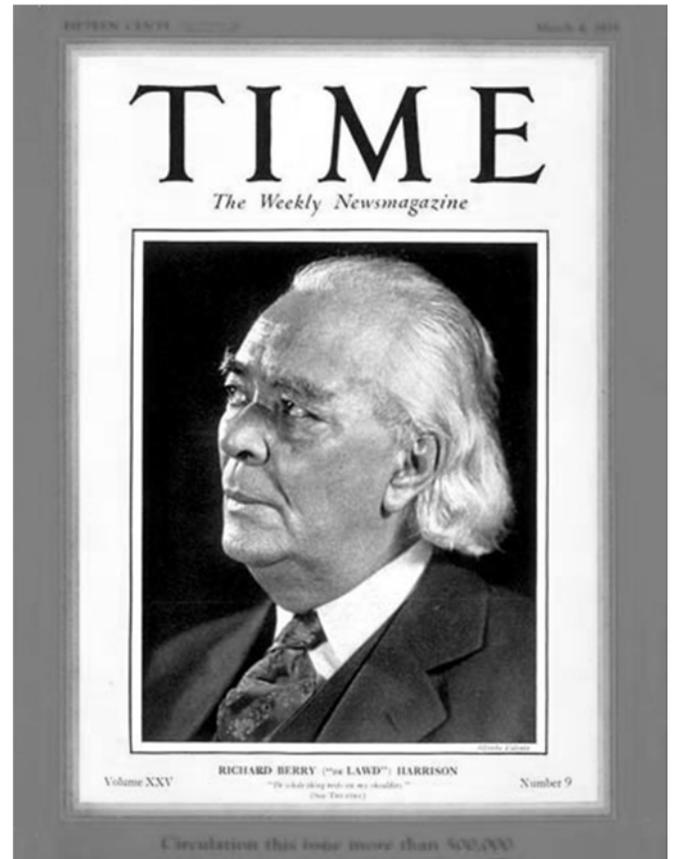
Reproduction of the card used for admission to London's first Klan meeting on April 23, 1925. The motto at the top of the card, "NON SILBA SED ANTHAR", means "Not for one's self, but for others."

and also earned him enough money to occasionally purchase a cheap seat for some of the performances, thereby awakening a life-long love affair with the theatre. The family eventually moved to Detroit, Michigan, circa 1880. There he attended the Detroit Training School of Dramatic Art, from which he graduated in 1887.

Like most actors, he struggled to make a living. It was not until he had reached the age of 65 in late 1929 that he was asked to play the role of God in playwright Marc Connelly's new play, *The Green Pastures*. Based on the first two books of the Old Testament, the play was written in the mispronounced broken-English stereotypically attributed to slaves that would clearly be labeled as racist today. Harrison's initial reservations about performing in a play with racial stereotypes "that might make Negroes feel I'd let them down," were eventually overcome and on February 26, 1930, he made his first appearance as "de Lawd" on the stage of the Mansfield Theatre on Broadway. The play was an instant success and gave him the fame that many actors never achieve in their lifetimes.



Richard Harrison.



Richard Harrison, shortly before his death.

Four years later, on October 29, 1934, his company pulled into the CPR station in London to give a performance of "de Lawd" at the Grand Theatre. Upon his arrival he was given the Freedom of the City and was the guest of honour at the London Rotary Club luncheon. As he was touring his old boyhood haunts along the river he recounted the story of how a gang of thugs calling themselves the Klux Klan had burned his family home to the ground only hours after they had left for Detroit. His sardonic wit was revealed when he was quoted as saying, "Fifty-four years ago they gave us a great celebration when we left London. They burned our house down."<sup>31</sup>

In 1935, on the afternoon of what would have been his 1,658<sup>th</sup> consecutive performance as "de Lawd," Harrison informed the producers that he was too ill to perform that night. Two weeks later, on March 14, 1935, and ten days after his photograph appeared on the front cover of TIME magazine, he died of a stroke at the age of seventy.

He was buried in Lincoln Cemetery in Blue Island, Cook County, Illinois. Sixty-eight years later, in the month of February 2003, Mayor Anne Marie DeCicco would unveil a historical plaque re-naming Nelson Park at the foot of Clarence Street as Richard Berry Harrison Park in his honour as part of London's Black History Month celebrations. The plaque is located just west of where his childhood home had stood.

The Ku Klux Klan slowly faded from London history, although undoubtedly some hardcore members continued to secretly subscribe to its theories of white racial superiority. In recent years, Martin Weiche, who had served as a Luftwaffe pilot during the Second World War and who was a former President of the Canadian National Socialist Party which was inspired by Nazi ideology, openly described himself as a racist and a Nazi, and occasionally permitted Ku Klux Klan cross and swastika-burning rallies to be held on his 12-acre farm known as "The Berghof," (the name of Hitler's former retreat in the Bavarian Alps) on Gainsborough Road just west of the hamlet of Hyde Park.<sup>32</sup> A cross-burning on his property in 1993 attended by approximately 40 people dressed in Klan regalia led the Ontario Government to consider amending the Ontario Human Rights Code to ban such activities.<sup>33</sup> Weiche died on September 2, 2011, at the age of 90.

Although there are several well-known white supremacists residing in London, they have not attracted attention by burning crosses. However, in the early morning hours of July 23, 2006, Dave Lucenti, described in the following day's issue of the *London Free Press* as "a white, self-employed and straight contractor,"<sup>34</sup> awoke to find a metre-and-a-half cross on his lawn that had been burned elsewhere. Suspicions were raised that this may have been an attempt to resurrect the cross-burning practices of the Ku Klux Klan, however, no evidence was found to support that conclusion and it is believed this was simply a feeble prank by individuals with too much time on their hands. The London Police hate-crime unit investigated the incident but no charges were laid because no particular individual or group appeared to have been targeted and no damage was done to the property.

Regardless of whether this incident was intended as a racial gesture, the city of London continued its long history of intolerance for this kind

of act, reminding those who may attempt such a stunt that London is and remains a city where all citizens should feel welcomed and safe, no matter their religion, skin colour or culture.



*Constable Ken Steeves checks out the charred remains of a wooden cross left on the front lawn of Dave Lucenti's home in south-east London.<sup>35</sup>*

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> All information contained in this article was obtained from the June 29, 1925, August 3, 1925, September 2, 1925, October 15, 1925, January 21, 1926, February 7, 1999, and July 24, 2006, issues of the London Free Press and the October 18 and 19, 1922, and October 30, 1937, issues of the London Advertiser, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> The founding members of the Ku Klux Klan were Calvin E. Jones, John Booker Kennedy, Frank O. McCord, Captain John C. Lester, Richard R. Reed and Major James R. Crowe.

<sup>3</sup> The *London Free Press* printed an Associated Press article in its April 10, 1965, issue in which Joe Tom Kennedy, the 78-year-old nephew of John Booker Kennedy, one of the co-founders of the KKK, was quoted as saying that the formation of the KKK "all started as a prank by some fun-loving, restless young bachelors home from the American Civil War." He went on to say that they though it hilarious to gallop through town on their horses dressed in white robes and terrifying the people of the town, especially the superstitious former slaves.

<sup>4</sup> The Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was adopted on July 9, 1868. Among its provisions, it overturned the 1857 decision by the United States Supreme Court in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* which held that blacks could not be citizens of the United States, it prohibited state and local governments from depriving persons of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, and it required each state to provide equal protection under the law to all people, eventually resulting in to the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision in 1954 which led to the abolition of racial segregation in American educational institutions.

<sup>5</sup> Martinez, J. Michael, *Carpetbaggers, Cavalry and the Ku Klux Klan*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> London City Directory, 1875-6.

<sup>7</sup> Although in agreement with the main points surrounding Dr. Bratton's kidnapping, the account by Jerry Lee West in his book, *The Reconstruction Ku Klux Klan in York County, South Carolina, 1865-1977*, Jefferson (N.C.) : McFarland & Co., 2002, differs on some minor points.

<sup>8</sup> Presently the new home of Oxford Book Shop Limited.

<sup>9</sup> London City Directory, 1876-77. Neither the house number for Manigault or Hill is known because house numbers were not published in London Directories at the time.

<sup>10</sup> Becher, Barker and Street, Barristers, London, Ontario, *A Statement of Dr. Bratton's Case, being explanatory of The Ku Klux Prosecutions in the Southern States*, pg. 2. Printed by the "Free Press" Steam Book and Job Printing Co., 1872, London, Ontario. University of Western Ontario Archives, Call No. DBWRC, JX4292, P6.579, 1872.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 15

<sup>13</sup> Martinez, J. Michael, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Birth\\_of\\_a\\_Nation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Birth_of_a_Nation)

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.historynet.com/the-birth-of-a-nation-when-hollywood-glorified-the-klk.htm> "The Birth of a Nation": When Hollywood Glorified the KKK, Published Online: June 12, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> *London Advertiser*, April 22, 1925.

<sup>17</sup> *London Free Press*, April 23, 1925.

<sup>18</sup> *London Advertiser*, April 24, 1925.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *London Free Press*, January 21, 1926.

<sup>21</sup> Federal Square was situated in the block bounded by Dundas, Waterloo, King and Wellington Streets, and was located just west of the Armouries.

<sup>22</sup> Usually the second in command of a local Klavern.

<sup>23</sup> *London Free Press* August 3, 1925.

<sup>24</sup> *London Advertiser*, October 15, 1925.

<sup>25</sup> *London Advertiser*, January 21, 1926.

<sup>26</sup> *London Free Press*, August 3, 1925.

<sup>27</sup> The Kleagle was the chief recruiting officer for a local Klavern.

<sup>28</sup> *London Free Press*, October 30, 1924.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph O'Neil, a local history advocate, brought to the writer's attention the fact that it is perhaps the "grandest of ironies" that Beth Emmanuel Church at 430 Grey Street in London, a predominantly black church, still uses a "fiery electric cross" exactly like the one used in the Klan funeral.

<sup>30</sup> For many years he had a church on Elizabeth Street, just north of Dundas Street. He was also a member of the London Auxiliary Police for several years.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *The Globe and Mail*, November 10, 1980.

<sup>33</sup> *Toronto Star*, May 12, 1993.

<sup>34</sup> *London Free Press*, July 24, 2006.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*