

NINTH ANNUAL HISTORICAL TOUR

Lumber Barons



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Fondation du Cimetière
Beechwood
Cemetery Foundation

JOHN RUDULPHUS BOOTH

Born in Waterloo, Quebec on April 5, 1827, Booth came to Ottawa in the 1850s to seek his fortune with a mere nine dollars in his pocket. Although he made steady progress, building a small shingle mill at Chaudière Falls, he faced several significant setbacks until his first breakthrough in 1859, when he secured the contract to provide lumber for the construction of Canada's new Parliament Buildings.

Booth made a substantial profit from this contract, which allowed him to pursue further business opportunities. In 1867, he outbid other lumbermen for the Madawaska River timber limits formerly held by the late John Egan. He turned a \$45,000 investment into an enormous profit; years later, he turned down an offer of \$1.5 million for those limits. Eventually, his mills produced more lumber than any other operation in the world.

While the Ottawa River watershed provided a natural highway for transporting timber rafts, its tributaries did not extend into the outer reaches of Booth's timber limits. So he embarked on a new enterprise: building a railway system to complement his other operations. He already owned the Canada Atlantic Railway, which he used to transport sawn lumber from his Chaudière mills to his planing mill and sorting yards in Burlington, Vermont and to sales offices in Boston. The new Ottawa, Arnprior and Parry Sound Railways Ottawa, Arnprior and Parry Sound Railway's primary purpose was to transport timber felled in areas inaccessible by waterway.

Since the production of pine timber alone could not offset the cost of the railway, Booth diversified by adding passenger and freight cars. He also built grain elevators on the Great Lakes and formed a freighter company so that growers could use his railway to ship western grain. And they did, since the railway shortened the route between Chicago and Montreal by 1,300 km. Booth sold the railway to the Grand Trunk Railway in 1904 for \$14 million.

Booth was among Ottawa's most generous philanthropists. He made considerable donations to charitable institutions and other agencies that cared for the sick and destitute. As one of three founding members of St. Luke's Hospital, a predecessor of the Civic Hospital, he donated \$10,000 towards its establishment.

Booth eventually expanded his business ventures into pulp, and cardboard paper production, remaining active right up to a few months before his death at 98. He never recovered from a cold caught during one of his yearly trips to his Madawaska timber limits. On December 8, 1925, he passed away as one of the richest men in Canada, with an estate valued at approximately \$33 million.



ERSKINE HENRY BRONSON

Born in Bolton, New York on September 12, 1844, Bronson came Ottawa in 1852 and eventually became one of Ottawa's most prominent businessmen. His father, Henry Franklin Bronson, founded the firm of Bronson & Harris around 1852 with a partner, Captain J.J. Harris, after securing advantageous water lots at Chaudière Falls. Erskine became a partner in 1867, shortly after Captain Harris' retirement. He and his father were joined by a new business partner, Abijah Weston, and carried on in the new firm Bronson & Weston. Erskine later diversified the firm's interests, expanding its lumbering operations to California, where he was a director of the Little River Redwood Company. He also capitalized on the growing demand for electricity by founding the Ottawa Electric Company. Other business interests included roles as President, Vice-President or Director of several electricity and power companies. He served as a member of the Board of Public School Trustees for 18 years and on city council as an alderman from 1871 to 1877. First elected to the provincial legislature in 1886, he was re-elected in 1890, when he was sworn into the Ontario cabinet as a minister without portfolio. Erskine Henry Bronson passed away on October 19, 1920, at the age of 76.

FRANK PIERCE BRONSON

Born in Bytown, Canada West in 1852, Bronson joined his father in the lumber business. After his father's death in 1889, he and his brothers continued the business; he was Vice President. He was a promoter of the Ottawa Carbide Company and the General Illuminating Company. He was also a director of the Timber Limit Owners Association and of the Ottawa Association for the Prevention of Tuberculosis. He was a Vice President of the Ottawa Electric and Consolidation Light, Heat & Power Company, and President of the People's Gas Supply Company. Bronson died in Ottawa on May 18, 1932.



HENRY FRANKLIN BRONSON

Bronson was born in Moreau, New York on February 24, 1817. He came to Ottawa with his business partner Captain John J. Harris and erected his first mill on Victoria Island. The Bronson & Harris logging operation was soon the largest in Ottawa. By 1880, the firm was known as Bronson & Weston when Bronson's son, Erskine, and Abijah Weston joined the company; Captain J.J. Harris had long since retired. When Bronson died on December 7, 1889, in his 73rd year, 241 vehicles formed the cortege to Beechwood Cemetery.

JOHN MERILL CURRIER

Currier was born in North Troy, Vermont in 1820 and came to Canada in 1837. Very active in the lumber industry, Currier and Moss Kent Dickinson were the first to manufacture sawn lumber for the American market. In 1868, Currier built a new residence at 24 Sussex Drive. He lived in this house until his death. In 1946, the Canadian government acquired the property and converted it into the official residence for the prime ministers of Canada. Also active in politics, Currier sat in the House of Commons, representing Ottawa until 1882. He was one of the founders of the Beechwood Cemetery Company; he was the first president of the company, a position he held until his death. A lumberman and politician of great tact and ability, he was very popular personally and politically. He passed away on April 21, 1884.



JAMES DAVIDSON

Born in Ottawa on November 1, 1857, Davidson immigrated to Liverpool, England, where he worked in lumber manufacturing. He was the pioneer of the ready-made sash, door and other finished lumber goods in Britain. When he returned to Ottawa, he eventually started a business under his own name, with extensive works and mills in Ottawa and in Davidson, Quebec. Davidson was president of the Wholesale and Retail Lumber Dealers' Association, an alderman for the city of Ottawa, chairman of the Board of Works and, eventually, mayor of Ottawa in 1901. He built and owned the Dominion Theatre in Ottawa and was president of the Capital Lacrosse Club for six years. Some give Davidson credit for the national capital's miles of finely constructed and well-kept streets. He passed away on October 6, 1911.

WILLIAM CAMERON EDWARDS

Born in Russell County in 1844, Edwards moved to Rockland at the age of 24 to found W.C. Edwards and Company, building sawmills in Rockland. The sawmills contributed substantially to the town's growth. Edwards became a prominent stockbreeder and agriculturist, and was elected in 1887 to represent Russell in Parliament. He also served as president of Canada Cement and of the Russell Agricultural Society, and as director of the Canadian Bank of Commerce, among other institutions. Edwards passed away in 1921.



SIR HENRY KELLY EGAN

Born in Aylmer, Canada East on January 15, 1848, Egan was educated in Montreal and went into the lumbering business. He was one of the founders and became managing director of the Hawkesbury Lumber Company, and was interested in a variety of projects in the Ottawa Valley. He was knighted in 1914, and died on October 19, 1925 in Ottawa.

ALEXANDER FRASER

Born in Goulbourn Township, Upper Canada on July 15, 1830, Fraser entered the lumber business at the age of 19. He and his brother John acquired great areas of timber limits with increasing production of square timber. He was acknowledged as one of the best lumber salesmen in Quebec. In 1885, he disposed of some of his timber to his sons, who carried on operations in both timber and sawn lumber. Fraser was one of the founders of the Lachine Rapids Hydraulic Company, the Lachine Light, Heat and Power Company, the Bank of Ottawa (1874), which he directed for 27 years, the Keewatin Lumber Company and the Rideau Club. He was a director of the Upper Ottawa Improvement Company, which handled all the logs on the Ottawa River. He was also one of the founders of the Ottawa Trust and Deposit Company (the first trust company in Ottawa), serving as its president until it was taken over by the Toronto General Trusts Company. Fraser passed away on June 1, 1903 at the age of 72.



JOHN GILMOUR

Born in Quebec on April 22, 1849, Gilmour was one of the pioneers of the lumber trade in Canada. He succeeded his father in business and became president of Gilmour & Hughson Lumber Company, with sawmills in Trenton, Hull and on the North Nation and Blanche rivers in Quebec. He was a lieutenant in the 8th Royal Rifles and from 1906 to 1907 he was president of the Ottawa Hunting and Riding Club. He died on July 15, 1912.

THE HUGHSONS

Lumber families dominated Ottawa society at the turn of the century. One of those prominent families was the Hughsons. The Gilmours and Hughsons owned timber rights on the Gatineau River, with milling operations at Chelsea. After selling the lumber business to Canadian International Paper in 1925, Jack and Hugh Hughson ran the stock brokerage firm of Hughson Brothers and Company. Hugh Hughson's house, now the residence of the New Zealand High Commissioner, won architectural awards when it was built in 1929. Hugh, the last member of the original Hughson family, passed away in December 1990 at the age of 96.



THE HURDMAN BROTHERS

Hurdman Road is named after the Hurdman brothers. One of Ottawa's enduring dynasties, the Hurdman brothers were pioneers in industrial and agricultural development along the Rideau River.

The patriarch of the clan, Charles Hurdman, was one of the first European arrivals in the Ottawa Valley. Originally from Ireland, he joined Philemon Wright's settlement in Hull. After six years, he left Wright's employ to farm his property on the Aylmer Road. His first son, William H., was born in Hull in 1818. Under the name Hurdman Brothers, William started the family lumber business in 1841 with his brothers Charles and Robert. It became one of the largest timber operations in Quebec.

In the early 1870s, William and Robert established themselves in the Junction Gore area of Gloucester Township, branching into large-scale farming. Eventually, both brothers were farming 200 to 300 acres each, using the most progressive methods of the day. William became director of two district agricultural societies. They won international awards for their horse breeding at the Centennial Exhibition of 1876 in Philadelphia. William also organized the Dominion Exhibition of 1879.

The brothers continued working in the lumber industry as well. They built their own bridge across the Rideau River to connect with their lumber and storage yards, and allowed travellers and the municipality to use it. It was the third span across the Rideau.

But when the Great Fire of 1900 wiped out the family's lumber mills at the Chaudière, they did not rebuild and decided to concentrate their efforts on farming. William and Robert established the earliest and largest piggery in Gloucester Township. The area around their farms became known as Hurdman's Bridge, a populous area of farmers and railway workers, including many German immigrants.

The present contracting firm of Hurdman Brothers (T. Fraser and Walter) was hired to remove the railway tracks from the downtown core of Ottawa in the late 1950s. Today, the firm specializes in moving heavy machinery and equipment.



DAVID MACLAREN

Born in Bytown, Canada West on October 5, 1848, Maclaren entered the lumber business with his father in 1871. He managed the Gatineau and Ottawa rivers branch, headquartered in Wakefield, in 1874. He was a justice of the peace, and served as mayor of Wakefield from 1878 to 1880. He became Director of the North Pacific Lumber Company Ltd., Director of the James Maclaren Company and Vice President of the Bank of Ottawa, and in 1908 he became the bank's President. He was a director for the Protestant Home for the Aged, Vice President of St. Andrew's Society in Ottawa, a trustee of Queen's University and commodore of the Ottawa Canoe Club. David Maclaren died on April 7, 1916.

JOHN MATHER

Born in 1825, Mather was an experienced millwright and machinist. He came to Canada from Forfarshire, Scotland in 1857 and settled in Chelsea, Quebec, where he directed woods operations and sawmilling for a company in the Gatineau. Very experienced in forestry and conservation, Mather was known for his expertise, energy, thoroughness, ability and integrity. He was the first owner of Munross House (453 Laurier Avenue East), President of the Free Press Publishing Company (Winnipeg), and Director of the Keewatin Lumber and Power Company. Mather, a prominent lumberman and contractor, died in Ottawa on June 10, 1907.



WILLIAM GOODHUE PERLEY

William Goodhue Perley was born in Lebanon, New Hampshire on June 4, 1820. As a teen, he started in the lumber business as a clerk, buying land in northern New York state. In the 1850s, he moved to Bytown with his business partner, Gordon Pattee. They purchased water lots at the Chaudière, running the successful business of Perley & Pattee. He bought land in LeBreton Flats and became the area's first rich man. His stone mansion was one out of only 25 listed in the 1853 city directory. By 1865, his mills were churning out 16 million board feet of lumber a year.

Perley augmented his fortune by ensuring a proper trade route to the United States. He started by organizing the local scene, where in 1866 he created a compromise urban transit system: horse-drawn streetcars transport that ran on rails.

He then moved on to the regional scene, founding the Upper Ottawa Steamboat Company in 1868. Finally, with the financial assistance of several lumber barons, he created and became President of the Canadian Atlantic Railway (1879-1888), guaranteeing Ottawa's access to American markets. He was also a member of Parliament for Ottawa from 1887 until his death on April 1, 1890.

Perley donated land and money to create the Perley Home for the Incurables. In 1896, his estate offered to donate a house for Ottawa's first public library, but Ratepayers rejected the project as too expensive.



JOHN ROCHESTER

Born in Rouse's Point, New York on May 22, 1822, Rochester came to Bytown in 1833. With his brother James, he established the first brewery in the city in 1856. He then turned his efforts to the lumber trade and built two large steam mills on the Chaudière, where he worked until his retirement in 1885. Rochester was voted mayor of Ottawa in 1870 and 1871, and helped organize, construct and equip the Ottawa Ladies College. He was a member of Parliament from 1872 to 1884, representing Carleton County. John Rochester passed away on September 19, 1894.

JAMES SKEAD

Born in Cumberland, England on December 31, 1817, Skead came to Canada with his parents. He settled in Bytown and became an important timber merchant and manufacturer. From 1862 to 1867, he represented the Rideau division in the legislative council of Canada as a Conservative and in 1867 he was called to the Senate of Canada. He passed away on July 4, 1884.



PHILIP NAIRN THOMPSON

Born in Newcastle-on-Tyne, England in 1817, Thompson emigrated with his family to Champlain, New York. In 1838, he came to Bytown to enter the flour trade. He built the flour and sawmills known as the Thompson Mills, which he operated until 1860 and later sold to local tycoons Bronson, MacKay and Booth. Respected throughout the community, Thompson served as local director of the Bank of Commerce and held extensive timber limits on the Gatineau River. He passed away in 1887.

ALONZO WRIGHT

Born in Wright's Town on February 26, 1825, Wright was the grandson of its founder, Philemon Wright. He worked in the lumber business on the east side of the Gatineau River near Farmer's Rapids, on a large property inherited from his father, Tiberius. In 1848, he married Mary Sparks, the elder daughter of Nicholas Sparks of Bytown. In 1863, Wright was elected to the Lower Canada legislature as a representative of Ottawa County and held this seat until Confederation in 1867. From 1867 to 1891, he was affectionately known as "the King of the Gatineaus" by his constituents and indeed by all across the Dominion.



Fondation du Cimetière

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◆ HISTORY TOLD, LIVES CELEBRATED ◆
◆ L'HISTOIRE RACONTÉE, DES VIES CÉLÉBRÉES ◆

