



**FOURTEENTH ANNUAL  
HISTORICAL WALKING TOUR**

**WOMEN  
OF  
BEECHWOOD**

◆ HISTORY TOLD, LIVES CELEBRATED ◆

*Fondation du Cimetière*

*Beechwood*

*Cemetery Foundation*





Matilda Lester



Lady Laura Borden



The *HMHS Llandovery Castle*  
Photo: Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management  
Photo Collection: Navy Ships: Llandovery Castle



Ida Van Courtland Tavernier



Roberta E. Tilton

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Henrietta Tuzo Wilson



Mary Ishbel Currier

## AHEARN, *Margaret Howett*

You have all heard the term ‘renaissance man’. Well, Margaret Howett Fleck Ahearn was a ‘renaissance woman’. Born Margaret Howett Fleck in Montreal in 1849, she was educated at McGill Model School, Mill Normal School and Bute House. In 1888 at age 38, she went to look after her recently deceased sister’s two young children in the house of her brother-in-law Thomas Ahearn. Six years later, she married Thomas who was an interesting character himself.

Margaret Fleck Ahearn became part of what must have been a very ‘forward-thinking’ household. Her husband Thomas started a company creating electricity. In fact, he has been called the man “who lit up Ottawa” because he provided the electricity for Ottawa’s first street lights. In 1898, Margaret was one of the first members of both the Women’s Canadian Historical Society of Ottawa and the Victorian Order of Nurses. She published her first paper which she presented to the Canadian Women’s Historical Society of Ottawa on 11 May 1900. In the Biographical Index of Artists in Canada, Margaret Ahearn is listed as a painter.

In 1892, her husband Thomas invented the electric cooking range. There is a story about Thomas serving a full meal cooked on the electric range, to show how well it worked. It's quite possible that Margaret had a hand in that! Thomas and Margaret must have shared an interest in new technology. In 1900, Margaret Ahearn became the first woman driver in Ottawa when she drove her husband’s electric car down Sparks Street!

Now you can see why Margaret Fleck Ahearn was a ‘renaissance woman’. Margaret died on 3 January 1915, and is buried in Beechwood with other members of the Ahearn family.

## BORDEN, *Lady Laura*

Laura Bond was born in Halifax in 1862, the daughter of a prominent local merchant. She married Halifax lawyer Robert Laird Borden in 1889. They had no children. After 1911 when her husband, as leader of the Conservative party, became Canada's eighth Prime Minister, Laura Borden moved to Ottawa and lived there until her death. She became Lady Borden in 1914 when her husband was knighted.

Lady Borden was the first Prime Minister's wife to assume an independent public role. While still living in Halifax she supported various organizations relating to expanding women's rights and interests. She was an officer as well as patron of the National Council of Women founded in 1893. The Council's mission then, as now, was to empower all women to work together to improve the quality of life of themselves and their families. During World War I and afterwards, Lady Borden worked tirelessly in support of the Red Cross and the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE).

The Borden's Ottawa home was a Rideau riverside property called "Glensmere" at 201 Wurtemberg St. Here they maintained a busy social life even after he retired from politics in 1919. They were active parishioners of All Saints Church on Laurier Ave. where they are commemorated by a plaque and a stained glass window. Sir Robert's state funeral took place there in June 1937 as did Lady Borden's on September 9, 1940. On that day a lead editorial in The Ottawa Journal praised her volunteerism and remarked on her "tact, kindness, gracious hospitality and understanding of many types of people". Her funeral was attended by many notables including P.M. Mackenzie King and representatives of the various interests she had supported. Now she lies beside her husband in Beechwood under the Canadian flag.

## CURRIER, *Mary Ishbel*

Born in Ottawa 1897 to Scottish Canadian parents, Ishbel wanted to become a doctor, but instead was a writer, farmer, mother of six, English teacher and housing developer. (Her eldest daughter, Ishbel, became the doctor.) Ishbel was the founder of "Honey Gables", a small housing development in Gloucester Twp. The property is on the Currier farm, where the family raised Guernsey cattle, and Ishbel and her children tended the garden.

Ishbel and her husband-to-be attended Lisgar Collegiate, married, lived on Wilbrod and Cartier, began raising their children, and then moved to the farm when Jenny the fifth child was about 12. Her husband William Little Currier attended University of Guelph School of Agriculture, and served as Deputy Commissioner of the Boy Scouts of Canada in Ottawa. He died in 1953. Her father, James Wilson Robertson, was the first Commissioner of the Boy Scouts, and of the Dairy and Agriculture Commission of Canada. Farming seems to run in the family, as do "good works".

After "Will's" death, Ishbel decided to subdivide a part of the farm, but also did some more writing. She published an award-winning children's book in 1967 "Evergreen Island", which she familiarly called "Shoes Off". She also wrote a newspaper column called "A Little Place in the Country" under the pen name Jemima Jane Low (a reference to her maternal family). To help her neighbours Ishbel taught English in her home to nearby Dutch farmers, and was active in the local Federation of Agriculture.

Ishbel, named after Lady Aberdeen, her godmother, was a modern woman involved with her family and her community. "Honey Gables" today is testimony to that commitment. Four of her children are buried with her and William in Beechwood, as are her parents and uncle Allan. Her two youngest daughters: Janet (Jenny) Craig of Gloucester and Catherine (Kitty) Francis of Toronto hope to be with us on June 8th to help us celebrate their mother.

## GALLAHER, *Minnie*

Minnie was born January 16, 1876 in Pittsburg Township, Ontario, the third of 10 children. Her Irish parents, Rev. John Gallaher and Maud Elder Logan, came to Canada after their marriage in 1871.

Minnie received her nursing education and graduated from the Lady Stanley Institute school of nursing in Ottawa in 1901. This school was established in the early 1890's by Lady Stanley, wife of the Governor-General, Sir Frederick Stanley of Stanley cup fame. After graduation she was in charge of a model hospital set up on the Toronto Exhibition Grounds, and elsewhere as an Assistant Superintendent. She enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force on September 2, 1915 and sailed for Britain September 27, 1915, arriving at Shorncliffe, Kent on October 17, 1915. She left Canada so fast that her medical examination was not carried out until she arrived in Britain!

Minnie was sent to France in January 1916 and served at No. 1 Canadian General Hospital at Etaples in northern France, and several field aid stations. At that time Etaples was a vast Allied military camp and then a giant 'hospital' city.

She was posted to HMHS Llandovery Castle on March 25, 1918. This British merchant vessel, serving as a Canadian hospital ship, was torpedoed on June 27, 1918, while returning to England from Halifax. Of the 258 Canadian crew and medical staff, only 24 survived. Among those who perished were the 14 Canadian nursing sisters aboard, including Minnie. Minnie Gallaher was missing and presumed drowned.

Many of her family are interred at Beechwood, and a monument was placed in Minnie's honour.



## LESTER, *Matilda*

**M**atilda, like so many women of her time, made a decision with her husband to emigrate to Canada to provide a better life for their children. Born 1826 in London, England, the darling only daughter of a successful china dealer, Matilda arrived in Ottawa already the mother of eight children, one of who had been born at sea. We can only imagine what went through her mind when the family disembarked at Ottawa in 1857, to see what husband Richard would later describe as “a little group of rabbit hutches.” Their first home was a tiny house on Ottawa Street, now Old St. Patrick.

In January 1862 the family moved to 100 acres south of Ottawa when they felt their most recent baby, now two months of age, was old enough. Their new home was an unchinked log house (with window and door there, but not yet installed)!

Matilda tended their twelve children and the farm while her husband worked six days a week at his trade, bricklaying, in Ottawa and contracting on furnace work as far away as Trenton. He had earned a good reputation because of his work on the Parliament Buildings. Over the years he brought his sons with him to help with the work, and thus taught them his trade.

When the boys, as young adults, all preferred bricklaying over farming, and there were better prospects for them in the city, they decided in 1883 to sell the farm and move to Besserer Street, Matilda’s last home. She died there, of cancer, at age 65 in 1891. In his later years, Richard, who lived to age 100, wrote in his memoirs: “She was an exemplary and loving wife, a kind, loving and affectionate mother, and a pattern to her sex. She was highly respected by all who knew her.”



## TAVERNIER, *Ida Van Cortland*

Ida was a "great lady" of the touring star era. She probably could have been a "superstar" of the 1890's, if she had chosen to leave her family and her home here in Canada for New York. Nevertheless she starred as leading lady in numerous theatrical productions, sometimes opposite her husband Albert Tavernier. Ida could deliver the heavy emotional roles: Lucretia Borgia, Cora the Creole in Article 47, Camille and Mercy in The New Magdalen.

Life began for Ida in 1855 as Ellen Buckley in England; then her family emigrated to Chicago. Here tragedy struck: she was the only family member to survive the Great Fire of 1871. Soon after she moved to Guelph, Ontario, working first as a teacher, and then discovering the theatre. By age 22 she had graduated from walk-on parts to speaking roles, under the tutelage of Charlotte Morrison at the Grand Opera House in Toronto. In 1879, she auditioned for William Nannery and joined his company in Halifax where Albert Tavernier was also playing. They married in New York and became a popular husband-wife team. By 1882 they formed their own troupe, Tavernier Dramatic Company which toured successfully from Halifax to Winnipeg, and the northern states until 1896 when Ida retired. Many of her costumes went to the (Ottawa) Little Theatre; maybe you have seen some of them.

Ida had two children, Percy and Ida. Percy was Dominion Ornithologist from 1911-1942, and wrote books, e.g. "Birds of Canada" (1934). Ida was on stage at ten, and was an accomplished pianist. She married John McLeish.

Ida Van Cortland Tavernier died on September 6 1924 at Lac Blue Sea, Québec. Soon afterwards a star came to Beechwood.

## TILTON, *Roberta Elizabeth*

**R**oberta Tilton (née Odell), daughter of Daniel I. Odell and Hannah E. Peavey, was born 20 September 1837 in Maine, USA. She married John Tilton of Saint John, New Brunswick, 11 November 1858, in Eastport, Maine. She died the 28 May 1925 in Ottawa and was buried in Beechwood Cemetery.

Roberta Tilton was a social reformer and founder of the National Council of Women. She is described as an attractive, energetic member of Victorian Ottawa society who could write convincingly and be a formidable speaker, especially concerning the role of women in society.

Roberta served as Secretary to the Church of England Benevolent Society at Christ Church in 1871, which would appear to be the first record of her public involvement. In 1878, she was elected first vice-president of the Ontario Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) becoming a founding member of the Ottawa WCTU in 1881.

She was the principal initiator of the Woman's Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada in April 1885. Her involvement with this organization continued until 1908 at which time she was President of the Dominion Auxiliary. This group which had grown to 70,000 members at her death in 1925 still is the Anglican Church of Canada's oldest continuous national organization. Roberta redefined the role of Anglican women in their church: from now on they initiated specific projects whereas they had been seen as help-mates in defined activities prior to this time.

Her work included the Protestant Orphan's Home, reorganization of the Girls' Friendly Society, and the National Council of Women of which she was one of the founders. She exemplified the desire of women to make their life deeds a living testimony to their faith, by assisting those around them to improve their lives.

The Anglican Church of Canada commemorates her life of service each year on May 30th.

## WILSON, *Henrietta L.*

**H**enrietta was a pioneering woman, but not in the traditional sense. In fact most of her family were pioneers. Her father, Henry Tuzo, crossed the continent with Sir George Simpson in 1853 and became a pioneer of British Columbia. Henrietta was born in Victoria in 1873, educated there and in England, and married John A. Wilson in 1907. John was a "pioneer" too - called the "father of civil aviation" in Canada. Later a son, J. Tuzo Wilson would become a geophysicist and do pioneering research on continental drift. But what about Henrietta?

Henrietta Tuzo liked to climb: mountains or hills, and surmount stimulating life problems. By 1906 she had climbed many mountains in the Alps and in western Canada, being the first Canadian-born woman mountaineer. And a pioneer she was: she made the first ascent of Peak Seven of the Ten Peaks (3246 m) in the Canadian Rockies. This peak was named for her - Mt. Tuzo. "The exhilaration cannot be described." She was a charter member of The Alpine Club of Canada.

After marriage and a move to Ottawa she never lost her love of climbing. Yet Henrietta Wilson was involved in many public-spirited organizations. The list is long: National Council of Women, Red Cross, Canadian Parks Association, Women's Canadian Club, the League of Nations, Ottawa Local Council and Horticultural Society. Henrietta was awarded the King's Jubilee Medal 1935 and Coronation Medal 1937 for her successes. Her husband praised her common sense.

Henrietta was a tall and elegant woman with a sunny disposition, a dedicated homemaker, a warm companion and tireless worker for so many causes dear to her heart and to her commitment to improve society. She died January 11, 1955 at 81, just three months after her husband, leaving two sons and a daughter, and seven grandchildren. Imagine - she had visited every WW II war bride who came to Ottawa. Surely she is remembered and loved by many. Now we celebrate her at Beechwood, her final resting place.

**OTHER IMPORTANT WOMEN  
AUTRES FEMMES IMPORTANTES**

**DR. VIOLETE BALESTRERI ARCHER  
(COMPOSER)  
SECTION 19 SG 280**

**ELLA HOBDAY WEBSTER BRONSON  
(SOCIAL ACTIVIST)  
SECTION 50 LOT 119-120-128**

**ANNIE AMERILA CHESLEY  
(NURSE INSTRUCTOR)  
SECTION 26 LOT 9 S.W. CT.**

**BETTIE COLE  
(JOURNALIST)  
SECTION B RANGE 6 GRAVE 20A**

**LADY FOSTER, ADELINE DAVIS  
(SOCIAL ACTIVIST)  
SECTION 22 LOT 15 N.W.**

**JEAN CAROLINE GALLOWAY  
(AUTHOR)  
SECTION 51S LOT TG 367**

**NICOLA GODDARD  
(1ST FEMALE AFGHAN CASUALTY)  
SECTION NMC 103 GRAVE 227**

**JESSIE KATHERINE JARMAN  
SECTION 50 LOT 36N**

**MAGE HAMILTON MACBETH  
(JOURNALIST)  
SECTION 24 PC GRAVE 23**

**MARIAN OSBORNE  
(DRAMATIST/POET)  
SECTION 50 LOT 37 S. E.**

**ROSA SHAW  
(JOURNALIST)  
SECTION B RANGE 6 GRAVE 25**

**CANDIS KAREN STEWART  
(1ST CANADIAN KIDNEY TRANSPLANT RECIPIENT)  
SECTION 21 PC GRAVE 101A**

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**For more information please call:  
The Beechwood Cemetery  
(613) 741-9530**