

A Social and Legal History of 78 and 80 Wurtemberg St, Ottawa

Marc S. Lowell and David LaFranchise June 2014



Other house histories by Marc Lowell and partners

Househistory1@yahoo.ca

bookbookmaggie@gmail.com

613-700-6765

25 Gilmour St

43 Gilmour St (Clarke House)

45 Gilmour St (Fagan House)

18 Queen Elizabeth Driveway (Haydon House)

25 Somerset St W

300 Somerset St W (Mamma Teresa's Ristorante)

46 Cartier St (former Carmichael Inn and Spa)

110 Waverley St

117 Waverley St (available online through johnkingteam.com/blog)

89 Daly Ave (Gasthaus Switzerland)

113 Crichton St

The Caplan Family

18 and 20 Rockwood St

59 Maclaren St (Harris House)

660 Maclaren St (available online through johnkingteam.com/blog)

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

In 1826 Lt-Col John By created two townsites flanking the land purchased for the new Rideau Canal and a protecting fortress. Lower Bytown, east of the Canal, was expected to become both a garrison town and an entrepot, handling much of the trade of Upper Canada and the Northwest. By surveyed a significant area: from the Ottawa River to the Rideau River, and from Rideau St to Cathcart St (lots B and C in Concessions B and C of the Broken Front of Nepean Township) (Nagy 1974 p5). As a garrison town, the land was owned by the Board of Ordinance and leased rather than sold to settlers, while the streets were named after military figures and the Royal family, including Wurtemberg for the King's eldest sister, Charlotte, Queen of Wuerttemberg; Charlotte and Cobourg for the King's daughter Charlotte, Princess of Wales and her husband, Prince Leopold of Coburg (later King Leopold I of the Belgians), and Clarence for the King's brother William, Duke of Clarence (later King William IV).



80 Wurtemberg Street

However, Bytown did not prosper: the proposed citadel was never built, the existing garrison was withdrawn, and the Rideau Canal never replaced the St Lawrence as a commercial highway. Not until the beginning of the trade in sawn lumber in the 1850s and the move of the provincial government from Quebec City in 1865 did Ottawa begin to grow. (Taylor, 1986 ch 2)

Even so, growth by-passed the eastern part of Lowertown: even after the legal problems were resolved and the area opened for sale (a process completed in 1859), the lots were uninviting: swampy to the west, high but unstable and sandy to the east. People preferred to build on higher and drier ground, or closer to the new mills at the Chaudiere and the Rideau Falls.

Although a few houses were built, much of the land remained swamp or market garden. Development was largely restricted to activities that Victorians thought belonged on the outskirts of town. In 1844 or 1845 (Ross 1925 p 102, Brault 1946 p 308), four new cemeteries were opened on what is now Macdonald Gardens, replacing both the four older cemeteries on the Ordinance land (roughly at Queen and Metcalfe Sts) and the newer RC cemetery on the south-east corner of Rideau and Cumberland Sts (Ross 1925 p 102). At the edge of the cemeteries, the Protestant General Hospital opened to patients at Rideau and Wurtemburg Sts in 1852 (Brault 1946 p 230). Anglesea Square (formerly south of Murray St between Chapel and Augusta Sts) was used as a rifle range for the militia (a big part of social life and Society at that time) (Brault 1946, p 308). Old timers reminiscing in the 1920s recalled the sandy hill at the east end serving as natural butts for the range – a cheap source of spent lead slugs to serve as sinkers for fishing in the Rideau. The hill also made a fun spot for rolling into the water in the summer and tobogganing in winter. (Desjardins 1926)

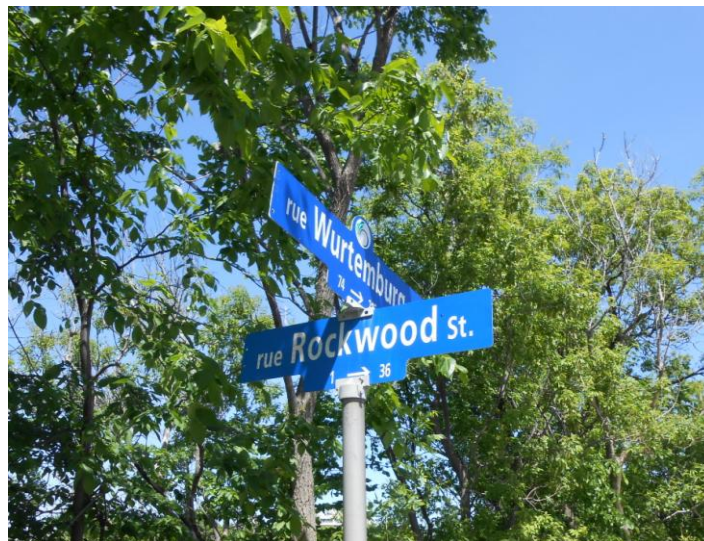


78 Wurtemburg St.

The 1870s saw more building, but no real change in character. The cemeteries were closed to new burials in 1872 when Beechwood and Notre Dame cemeteries were opened, although they were not removed until after 1887 (Nagy 1974, p 31). The Rifle Range moved to what is now Strathcona Park around the same time. Hospital services expanded: a new Protestant General Hospital (the present Wallis House) was also opened in 1872, and the old building converted to an isolation hospital (for treatment of infectious diseases in the days before antibiotics). A maternity hospital, nurses training institute and other medical facilities were built along Rideau St towards the River, while in 1879 the Grey Nuns opened Ste-Anne's Hospital, an isolation hospital on part of the former RC cemetery at Cobourg or Charlotte and Heney Sts. Ste Anne's church was built in 1878, but the larger part of the parish was actually across the river in New Edinburgh and Clarkstown. A few large houses were built along the bluff over the Rideau, one of which (the current Turkish embassy) was converted to a children's hospital (Brault 1946, p 225 ff).

Despite the development of streetcar lines on St Patrick and Rideau Sts, development continued to lag. A syndicate, the Riverview Property Ltd, bought a large tract of land, surveying part in 1910 and a second part (the area east of Charlotte St and north of Clarence St) in 1911, laying out Rockwood St and the north end of Wurtemburg. It's possible that the company may have drained some of the swampy land and dug down the north end of the hill to fill in the lower spots. A few lots were sold, but in 1918 John Davis foreclosed on the company, gaining ownership of all of its remaining property. (Registry Office, instrument 141693)

Davis is listed in deeds as “gentleman”, suggesting that he was both a man of substance and retired: he is believed to have immigrated to Ottawa in the 1875s (Desjardins 1926) and to have built a house on Clarence St near Cobourg (Miller-Chenier 2014). Although it has not been confirmed, odds are that he was partner with his brother in M.P. and J.T. Davis, described as “wealthy building contractors with excellent connections to Laurier (Gwyn 1984 p 480)”. Building contractors, they received substantial and lucrative contracts from the Laurier government for the construction of the National Transcontinental Railway. (Stevens 1962, vol 2 p 22 and multiple references thereafter)



Davis does not seem to have been sanguine about development of his property: in April 1919 he tried, unsuccessfully, to sell the land to the City of Ottawa Housing Commission, which judged it too expensive (OHC minutes 1919-05-13). Writing the Provincial Architect that same year about the proposed house for the lot at no 80, the Commission's own architect commented that it was unlikely that there would be any development around it “in the immediate future” (Roy file, letter of 1919-08-02).

Likely because of the growth of the Civil Service during the War, as well as the pent-up demand, development did take place. Davis sold the lot for no 80 to J.A.Caius Roy in July 1919 for \$900, and the lot for 78 to John A. Burroughs in October 1919, also for \$900. Both Roy and Burroughs applied to the Ottawa Housing Commission for financing to build their houses. (see abstracts in Land Registry Office for lots 41 and 42, plan 106707).

Remember that in 1919 there was no mortgage insurance, no building code, no town planning and no zoning; there was also a major housing shortage and substantial public anger at speculators of all kinds. The Federal Government launched a “Better Housing Scheme” providing \$25M to the provinces for 20 years at 5% interest. Ontario then loaned its share (\$8M) and a provincial top-up of \$2M to municipalities, with the goal of (1) promoting good, modern housing to relieve the housing shortage (2) enabling working-class home ownership, particularly for veterans, and (3) encouraging town planning. To do this, the municipalities were expected to (1) lay out model subdivisions, (2) loan money to cooperatives or limited-dividend housing companies, and (3) loan money to potential owner-occupiers. The scheme lasted roughly three years (1919-1922). Historians in general do not consider it a success and brand Ottawa’s experience as a “spectacular failure to achieve the stated goals of the program (largely because most of the money went to people who could have afforded a regular mortgage). (Sendbuehler and Gilliland 1998)



Rear of 78 Wurtemburg St.

The City of Ottawa established its Housing Commission in April 1919. After reviewing a number of sites (including the Davis estate) the Commission bought and laid out Lindenlea, the Reid farm (Civic Hospital area) and the Parkdale Estate (possibly the area around the Royal Ottawa hospital) (OHC minutes Apr-May 1919). Most of its activity centred on developing these estates. However, about a third of the houses built under the Scheme were financed by loans (mortgages in all but name) to individuals who already owned a lot. To be eligible, owners had to have lived in Ottawa for some time (this requirement was waived for veterans), to own their land outright (free of mortgages and other charges) and to have their site plans and building plans approved by the Commission’s own architect, W. E. Belfry, and for loans over \$3000 by the Provincial architect as well. The Commission offered a number of standard housing designs, some developed by Belfry for Ottawa, some developed for the Province, and maintained a list of available contractors (OHC minutes 1919).

Roy applied in June 1919 (even before the sale of the land was complete) . At the time he was 36 years old, married to Albertine Cliche and living at 195 Bolton St. He worked in the Money Order Department of the Post Office, earning \$1300 a year. He supplied his own plans, which ran into problems both in Ottawa and Toronto: the house was too big for the lot, the rafters were too far apart, the stairs too steep, and “the cost of the house appears to us rather excessive” (OHC Roy file)

Burroughs applied in October 1919 – 38 years old, single, living at 195 Waller St, a clerk in the Department of Customs and Inland Revenue, earning \$1400 a year. Burroughs and Roy must have talked, because in the end both chose Belfry’s standard plan “L” (later called “style 15”) though Burroughs had the plan reversed, and both requested a number of changes, e.g. additional windows, simpler porch, etc. Both chose the same contractor, Cardinal and Brunet (OHC Burroughs and Roy files).



Rear of 80 Wurtemburg St.

The Provincial architect had some concerns about the siting of the houses, notably the limited space between 78 and 80, also the proposed use of 2x3 lumber for internal partitions, but with reassurance from Belfry, in November 1919 Roy and Burroughs were granted loans of \$4000, the maximum amount allowed for a solid brick house, payable in installments as building progressed.

Belfry inspected the completed house at no 78 on 22 April 1920 and Burroughs moved in. In October he wrote to confirm that all work had been done to his satisfaction, and he received the final installment of the loan. Roy at no 80 did not have the same experience: while he does seem to have been a prickly person to deal with, he had real problems with the contractors. July 1920, Roy wrote to Belfry to complain of work left undone: leaks in the roof and the foundation, unfinished mouldings, window pulleys not working, broken wash basins, and so on. Belfry inspected the house in October 1920, noting that the plans had been carried out except that several small windows had been added. Most of the problems had been resolved, but he was concerned about the stability of the hot water

tank, and also that the bay window was 4" deeper than planned and might cause problems with snow and ice build-up. In January 1921 Roy wrote again complaining about leaks in the basement. By this point the contractor was desperate to be paid, and there was discussion of legal action.

Although the contractors had tendered to deliver the houses as planned for \$4000, both Burroughs and Roy had spent an additional \$900 on their houses, and in November 1920 the Commission agreed to increase their loans to \$4200. There seem to have been no further problems, and the loans were paid off at \$28/month, the discharge for both properties being registered in 1942.



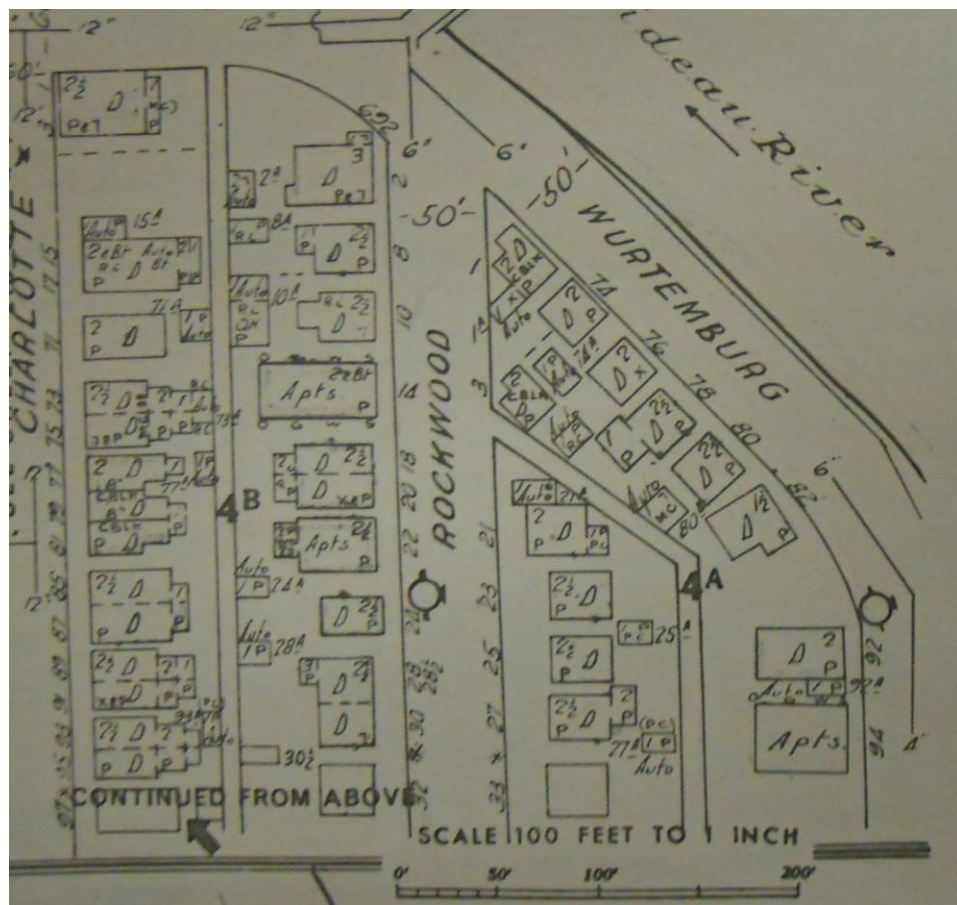
Corner of Wurtemburg St. and Rockwood St.

Both Roy at no 80 and Burroughs at no 78 owned their houses for over 50 years, until they both died in 1972. Burroughs married Alice Dumouchel in 1920 and had two daughters and two sons. Alice was a musician, organist first of Sacre-Coeur on Laurier Ave and later of Ste-Anne on St Patrick St. She died unexpectedly at home in 1954 at the early age of 62 (Citizen 1954-11-11). Burroughs continued to live in the house until his death.

The Roys lived in their house until 1961, when they rented it out to John and Henriette Hudson, the daughter and son-in-law of John A. Burroughs (John worked for the Department of Transport). Mrs Roy may have already been an invalid (she died in the Residence St-Louis nursing home at Hiawatha Park, now part of Orleans, in 1969) or because they became snowbirds (Roy himself died in Ft Lauderdale). (obituaries in the Journal 1969-05-20 and 1973-01-02).

In 1973, Charles Burroughs, son of John A Burroughs and one of his executors, bought no 80, so that both houses were briefly owned by the Burroughs family.

The 1956 Fire Insurance map (only one available for the area) shows that a one-storey wing had been added to no 78 and a garage built behind no 80. Both houses are shown as having patent siding (insulbrick) or tar and gravel.



956 Fire Insurance Map

For much of this 50 years, the blocks immediately around no 78 and no 80 changed very slowly: the many hospitals closed in the 1920s. An income survey from 1941 shows that most people in the area were still in the highest of three income bands (average earnings more than \$1700/year) (Taylor 1985 Map 9, p 180). The 1950s were generally difficult years for older neighbourhoods: the new suburbs offered quality housing at a cheaper price than that demanded for older houses run down after the tight money of the

Depression and the War years. However, the area seems to have its own: the City's 1958 survey of housing stock rated the area east of Cobourg St as largely "fair" – the best rating it gave to most of the pre-1950 City (Ottawa 1962 map 14 "Housing Survey").

The City's first comprehensive zoning by-law was passed in 1964, with the assumption that older areas would be re-developed at a much greater density, as for example the demolition of the Borden house and construction of the Watergate apartments. Ironically, it was just about this time that people began moving back into the central area and renovating older homes. This was probably helped by the many changes tied to the Lowertown East urban renewal project in the 1970s – closures to turn Charlotte St from a major artery into a local street and end the division of Macdonald Gardens, renovation of the streets, new street lamps, etc.

In the midst of this change, Charles Burroughs was able to sell no 80 in December 1973 to David and Catherine Preston for \$33,000 and no 78 to Barbara and Robert Thain for \$35,000.



Robert Thain worked for the Defence Research Board, and the Thains owned and lived in the house for 30 years. In July 1994 they secured a mortgage of \$233,400 against the house, some of which may have been used for renovations. In December 2003 Barbara became the sole owner (divorce? death of Robert?) and sold in January 2004 to Hugh Brennan. Brennan owned the house for only a year and then sold to Robert and Ann Gagne. The Gagnes re-mortgaged the house in 2007, 2009 and 2010 before selling in 2010 to the present owners and residents, Simon and Christina Leadlay. Unfortunately there is a gap in the City Directories for this address, so it is not certain whether Brennan and the Gagnes lived in the house or rented it out.

The Prestons were in the Foreign Service: when in Ottawa they lived in the house (notably 1977-1980) and when away, rented it out, often to other Foreign Service couples (telephone call with Preston). They sold in 1986 for \$120,000 to a partnership of Gregory Kozica, Steve Reed and David Grace; Grace withdrew from the syndicate in 1987, and

Kozica and Reed sold to Michael Gurstein in 1988 for \$147,500. Gurstein in 1989 added another \$30,000 to the mortgage, some of which may have funded renovations. Gurstein sold in turn to Diane Bignell in 1991. During this entire period (1986-1994), the house was an income property with tenants turning over every one or two years.

Bignell sold in 1994 to Catherine Ann Mitchell for \$225,000. Mitchell lived in the house from 1994-1997, and then rented it out until selling it in 2003 to Mario Mastroangelo and Zophia Porebski, who used it as an income property until selling to the present owners, Richard Briggs and Carole Sauve, in 2007.

Briggs was born in Ottawa and grew up in the area between Fisher Park and Hampton Park. With a degree in computer engineering from the University of Ottawa, he writes open source system software and is active in the Linux and computer security communities. He has also been involved with solar-powered vehicles since his university days.



Cummings Bridge - 1970s - East of Wurtemberg St.

Carole Sauve was also born and raised in Ottawa, and after studies at University of Ottawa and Carleton completed a graduate degree at the University of Kent at Canterbury, England. Carole has several decades of experience working with refugees, both as a volunteer and a government official.

Both Richard and Carole have strong interests in environmental issues and have travelled extensively in China, Cuba, Australia and the UK. They plan to make Wurtemberg a home for themselves and their children, son Nicholas and daughter Annabelle for the foreseeable future.

Richard is well known in Macdonald Gardens as the “the bike guy” because of his stable of unusual, practical and outright wacky bicycles for touring, hauling or parades. Both are active and visible members of the local community.

Sources

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No 80 is Lot 41, no 80 is Lot 42, both on registered plan 106707 of 1911. Since the mid-1990s, abstracts and instruments are computerized and a user fee is charged for consultation. Older records are on microfilm.

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