

The Hamilton-Mather House, 660 Maclaren St (plan 30671, E part lot 2, W part lot 3 South Maclaren), Ottawa Ontario

The story of the Hamilton-Mather house begins with William A Hamilton, partner in Hamilton and Fraser planing mill and sash and door factory at 46 Elm Street (corner of Rochester), who built the existing house in 1898.

Ottawa's economy was lumber – the streets around the Chaudiere and the Rideau Falls echoed to the roar and whine of saws turning millions of board feet of timber floated down from the upper valley into lumber for export to New England and New York. Though we must imagine Hamilton and Fraser as more like a large garage than a massive factory, as the city's population grew (from 44,000 in 1891 to 59,000 in 1901), there was a steady market for windows and doors. We can imagine that William Hamilton, infused with the optimistic mood of the period, must have searched for a appropriate home.

Bronson and Maclaren offered a suitable site – near the highest point in central Ottawa (Dundonald Park) but within walking distance of his business. The land was part of the original estate of Col By, sold by his heirs in 1877 to a development partnership, the Ottawa Freehold Association. Early growth in Ottawa tended to run south along Elgin and Bank streets and westwards from Lebreton Flats, so that it was not until 1889 that the land south of Somerset and west of Bank was subdivided. In an unusual arrangement, Hamilton and the purchasers of 658 and 662 Maclaren arranged to divide lots 2 and 3 to provide three extra-wide lots (33 feet instead of the usual 25 feet). They then appear to have contracted with one builder to have three almost identical houses built – two and a half storeys, with double parlours, a large verandah with its own side entrance to the “family” parlour, and a fashionable bay. It appears that only Hamilton had the house faced with brick from Hull.

Hamilton was able to enjoy his new house for only a few years. In 1901 the Great Fire wiped out Lebreton Flats and its mills, feeding on the stacks of lumber and piles of sawdust. Hamilton and Fraser lost their business, but were able to reopen nearby, at 248 Lebreton St. Whether because of financial pressures connected to the fire, or for other reasons, Hamilton sold the house in 1903 to Edith and Christopher Armstrong, a foreman, for \$2350. The Armstrongs lived in the house along with another relative for only two years: in 1905 they gave it to a James Warne, who immediately sold it to William H Tate, or Tait, a real estate and insurance agent with an office at 281 Bank St (near Somerset). Tate or his neighbour at 662 may have been an early car-owner, as they arranged for the common laneway between the two houses leading to the shed or garage in the back.

Tate lived in the house till 1910, selling to Herbert Watt, initially a carpenter but later a mechanic at an Imperial Oil garage at 310 Percy St (at Chamberlain). He sold in 1919 but arranged with the new owners to live in the house until 1921.

The house then became a family homestead as the Mathers moved into the house in 1921 and lived in it for two generations, 66 years, selling only in 1987. Donald Mather,

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

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

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