

Looking Backwards

This is another chapter in the "Looking Backwards" series being published throughout this summer as a weekly feature of the Colborne Chronicle and Cobourg Star. The series peers into Colborne and area's past, revealing many sidelights of our area's history that few of us have seen before.

"Looking Backwards" is authored by Walter Luedtke, a 10-year resident of Colborne, who, during the school term, is head of the history department at Brighton High School.

Anyone who has information which might aid Mr. Luedtke in his research or has an idea of a possible area of interest that has not been dealt with before might contact him at 355-2502.

Kelwood

Every town and village should have at least one good ruin. Where else are mystery and romance, not to mention hidden treasure, as readily met as in the shadows of a ruin on a moonlit night?

Ruins are also places for contemplation, for pondering the transitory nature of things, the vanity of it all. Just like the moon in June, ruins are essential for many things.

Colborne used to have two very nice ruins. One of these is still standing, the

surrounding countryside. To fight the chill winds off the lake in winter, the parlor had an enormous fireplace of green marble.

To the east, the drawing room was the most sumptuous room in the entire building. From its 15-foot ceiling a bronze chandelier cast its light over gilded ebony furniture and knickknacks of Victorian taste. The centre of the room belonged to a large ebony table with a marble top. Keeler's three daughters

Keelers into the hands of the wealthy William McNeal. He was present in the house when disaster struck in the summer of 1911.

Apparently during a fierce thunderstorm the house was struck by lightning and was set ablaze. According to local tradition, it was the carriage way that was hit and the fire quickly spread through the woodwork inside.

By the merest coincidence, the fire was discovered by Dr. Alyea, the Colborne veterinarian, who was driving with a companion down Percy Street near midnight. Dr. Alyea raced up the steep hill and roused Mr. McNeal and Mr. and Mrs. Earl. The Earl children slept in the upper bedrooms and it proved impossible to bring them down the centre stairway. No ladder could be found to reach the upper windows and the rescuers had to improvise, tying two short ladders together with their handkerchiefs. By this device the children

on six acres of orchard, commanding a gorgeous view of Lake Ontario. Two wells irrigated the grounds; their water, according to Mr. Bill Troop, carried in iron pipes.

The house was built in the Gothic Revival style, its entire gable decorated with bold bargeboard designs. A spacious

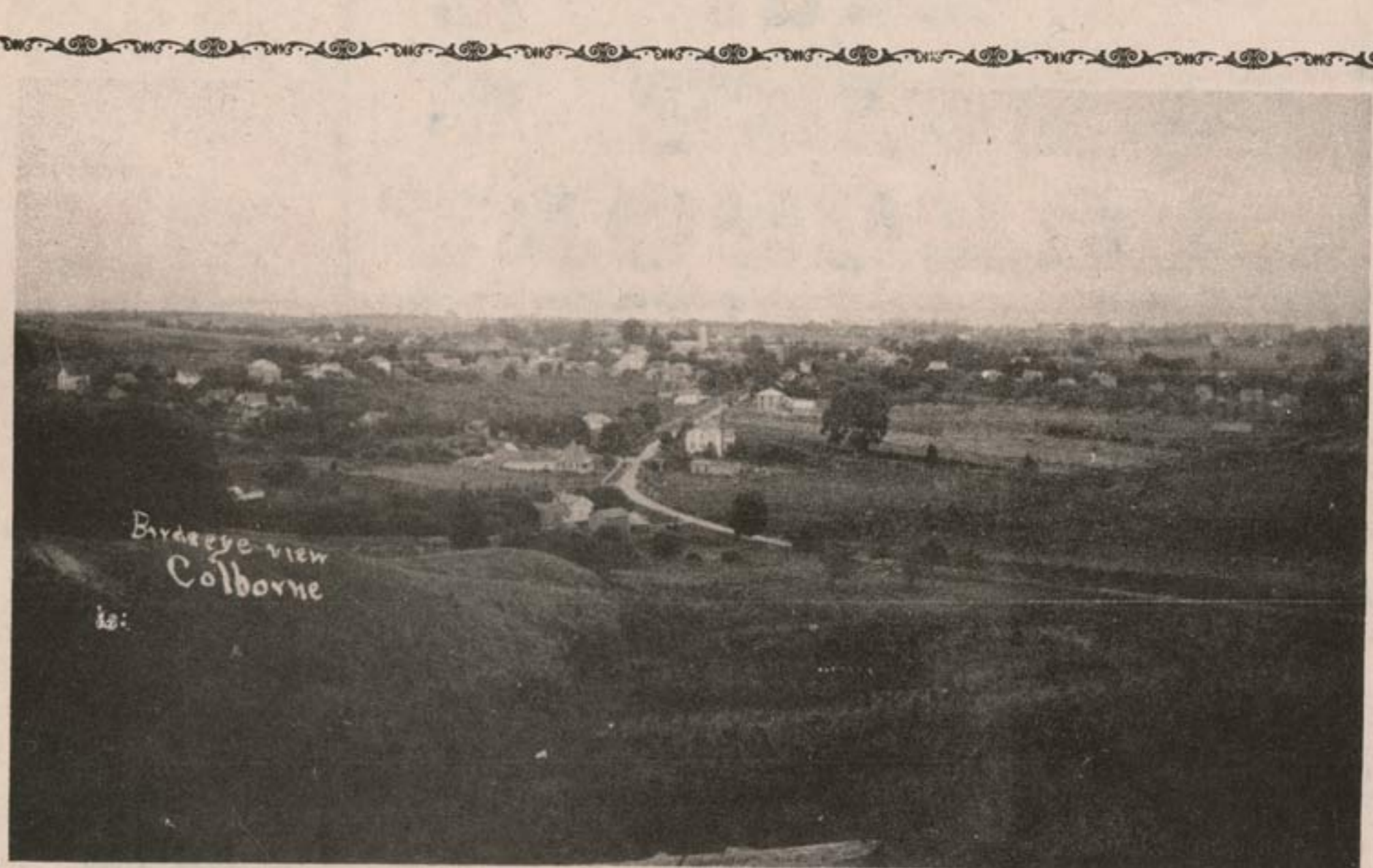
verandah ran along the front, facing the lake. a conservatory, an ice house, a large stable and drive house were also part of the property.

Quorn Cottage also burned, apparently struck by lightning. Finally, Kelwood provided inspiration to the Colborne poet Jim Bell, in both youth and old age.

Kelwood

The everlasting hills of Kelwood seem to sleep,
Dreaming of glories long since past and gone,
When Keeler built his mansion in the sun
And from its windows watched the sunlight creep
O'er Presque Isle point and up the quiet lake.
What wondrous dreams his fertile brain conceived,
What visions passed before his mental gaze
We can but guess but this we surely know,
Far as the sweep of blue Ontario,
O'er hill and valley, forest, stream and lake
He saw the nation that brave men could make,
Then making vows, that never could he keep,
Like Kelwood's hills, he too fell fast asleep.

The nation grows but does not think or care
Who laid the corner stone so firmly there.



View of Colborne from Kelwood Hill, ca.1900.



This somewhat blurred photograph is the only picture of Kelwood that seems to have survived. It shows the south side of the house, facing the lake.

old Christie Mill on the Creek, just west of the village. The shell of the mill was built of the same Lakeport limestone as the Presbyterian Church, and it will likely stand forever.

Our other romantic ruin has almost disappeared now. One can still trace the outlines of a substantial building by a series of depressions in the ground and the remains of field stone foundations. Blackberries and wild roses grow around red patches of crushed bricks. This is all that remains of what was once the grandest residence in Colborne.

Kelwood was the "Great House on the Hill" overlooking the lake and the village. Joseph Keeler built it for himself in the 1850s. It is difficult to determine just when it was built, but Mrs. Hetherington, who knew the building in her youth, says that it took the best part of twenty years to complete the house, the wings and the grounds.

In Kelwood's heyday, the visitors' buggy would enter the estate through a gate on Percy Street, proceed through the park and approach the mansion in a fine flourish from the west. The buggy would stop under a covered carriage-way, similar to one in the "White House" in Brighton. Then the visitor would mount a short flight of steps and enter.

Passing through a small vestibule, he would enter the octagonal hall, the centre core of the building. The two-foot brick walls of that hall rose from the basement right to the attic. On the ground floor, tapered floorboards of alternating light and dark wood radiated from a centre plaque. A thick glass ceiling on the second floor level allowed the light from the skylight to pass through and to illuminate the hall.

To the south of the building, the parlor's eight-foot windows had a commanding view of the

probably played the ebony grand piano. Again a black marble fireplace consumed 4-foot logs.

The dining room to the west had less of an undertaker's atmosphere. The room was panelled in walnut throughout and contained a regal dining room table. The kitchen that supplied it, was to the north, next to the entry. Here the cook and the maids were busy around a huge stove.

Frescoes decorated the walls of the centre hallway and the staircase. Painted by the Reverend Dowling, Colborne's first Baptist minister, they showed autumn and winter scenes, animals and soldiers on horseback. Descending the stairway one followed the course of a river flowing over rocks. The centre piece of that fresco was a soldier, wearing helmet and breastplate, mounted on a rearing horse.

The servants lived in separate quarters in a wing to the west of the house. The ground floor held the stables and the carriage shed.

From the house, walkways and bridlepaths led past venerable old trees into park-like woods. Walnut, maple and pine trees had been cut down to build the house, but there were plenty left. In a clearing, springs fed a large pond which was used for skating parties during the winter.

The last Keeler to grow up and live in all this splendour was Joseph Keeler III, the grandson of the refugees who had landed on the pebble beach at Lakeport. "Little Joe" published and edited the Colborne Transcript and was elected to Parliament in the years 1867-74 and from 1878 until his death in Ottawa on January 21, 1881. He had been the only son of Joseph Keeler II, who survived him by four years, dying at the age of 97 in 1885. Kelwood passed from the

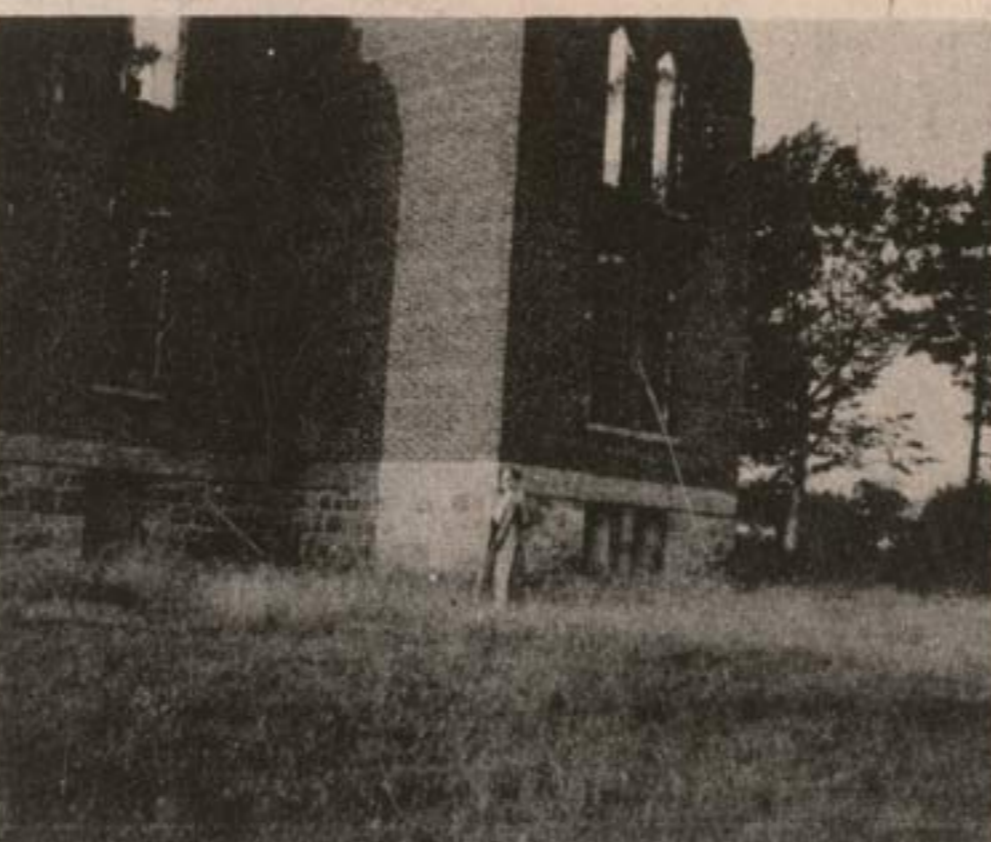
reached safety.

When morning came, the house was a scorched shell with only the massive walls jutting into the sky. The ruin became a favorite picnic spot and many a Colbornite, who had never set foot in the house, had his picture taken in front of the ruin.

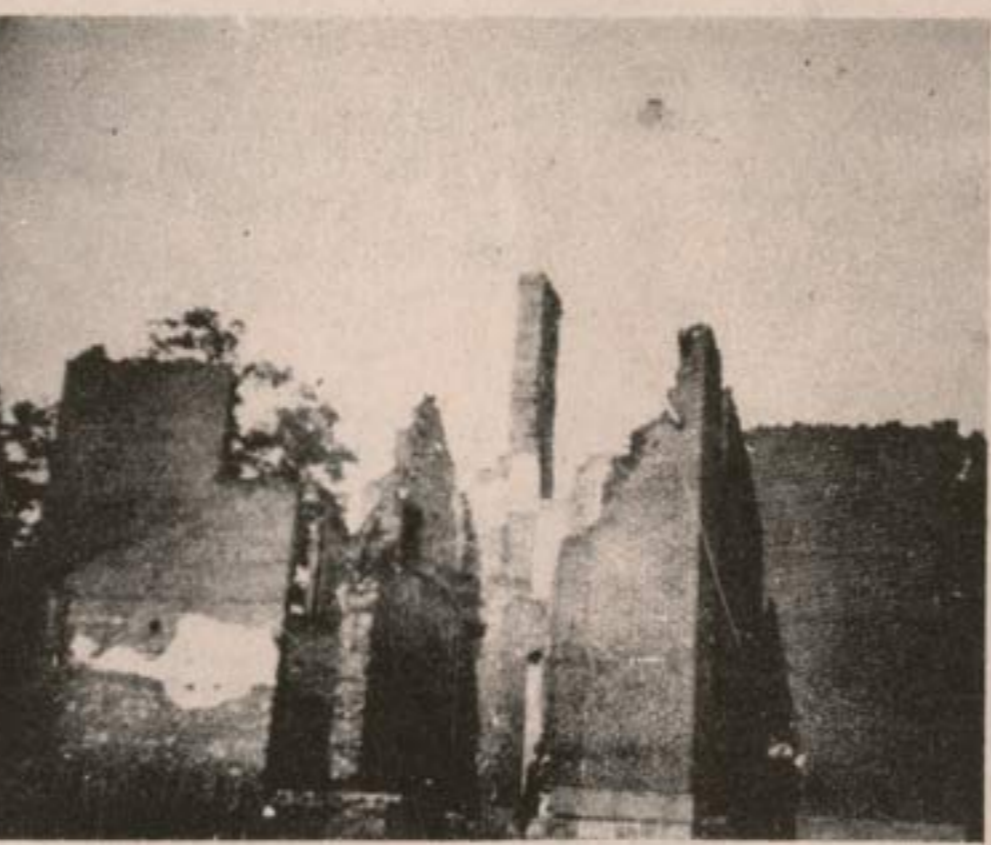
What happened to the gaunt walls of Kelwood? The answer is found in the following advertisement in the Colborne Express on September 8, 1919. "Brick for Sale -- good second-hand brick. Estimate 100,000 for building purposes. On Kelwood or it could be shipped to purchaser. G. E. R. Wilson."

Kelwood's stately trees went the same way. Wilson also had for sale "200,000 square feet of about 60 per cent White Pine and Spruce. Others Maple, Ash, White Oak, Elm, Beech and Cedar. Level plateau, no underbrush on Kelwood."

Kelwood Hill brought ill fortune to another house, smaller but more picturesque, located further east along the ridge. That was Quorn Cottage, built by the Rideouts and later owned by Captain Dougherty, master of the Reliance. The house stood



Kelwood in ruins. The young lady is standing in front of the parlor windows on the south side.



The gaunt walls of Kelwood. Looking into the shell from the west, the remains of the octagonal centre hall are visible. Even the interior walls were of solid brick.



Quorn Cottage, picturesque neighbor of Kelwood.

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