

Web Family Cards

Jim Leonard

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Contact



jamescleonard@hotmail.com



Jim Leonard

Brampton, ON, CANADA

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Victoria
Hall
Cobourg
Charles T.
THOMAS
stone carver

Web Family Cards

Charles THOMAS

James HAYNES

unknown THOMAS

m. May 19, 1840, Parish Church of St Mary, White Chapel (London, England)

Charles Thomas THOMAS 



b. 1820, Wales

d. Dec 25, 1867, Quincy, Illinois, USA, age: 47

occ. Master Stone Carver; Building Contractor;
Stone Mason

cod. Construction accident on building of bridge
over Mississippi River near Quincy, Illinois

Susan Mary HAYNES

b. abt 1815

d. Oct 12, 1872, Ottawa, ON, age: 57

occ.

cod.


Children

Susan Sarah THOMAS

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Person Sheet



Name Charles Thomas THOMAS 
Birth 1820, Wales
Death Dec 25, 1867, Quincy, Illinois, USA
Occupation Master Stone Carver; Building Contractor; Stone Mason
Cause of death Construction accident on building of bridge over Mississippi River near Quincy, Illinois
Father [Charles THOMAS](#)
Mother [unknown THOMAS](#)

Spouses

1 [Susan Mary HAYNES](#)
Birth abt 1815
Death Oct 12, 1872, Ottawa, ON
Father [James HAYNES](#)
Marriage May 19, 1840, Parish Church of St Mary, White Chapel (London, England)

Children [Susan Sarah](#) (~1847-1875)

Notes for Charles Thomas THOMAS

Arrived in Cobourg, Ontario in 1857 as master stone carver and superintendant of stone cutters on construction of Victoria Hall and Bank of Montreal; brought his orphaned 3 year old neice, Mary Tomlins Thomas with him.

Previously C.T. Thomas was stone carver of Brock's Monument in Queenston Heights.

Following the Cobourg work Thomas was Chief Superintendant of Works on the construction of the East and West Blocks of the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa with Port Hope contractors, Jones, Haycock and Clarke. The Thomas's relocated to Ottawa.

In 1867, with the completion of the Parliament Buildings Thomas went with Thomas Curtis Clarke, Civil Engineer to be contractor on the construction of a major bridge over the Mississippi River, Quincy, Illionios. Thomas was killed on a construction accident and died Christmas Day, 1867 following the

amputation of a leg.

C.T. Thomas is buried in Ottawa.

Charles Thomas: A Stonemason's Legacy Restored

By: Jim Leonard

Bibliographic Reference: "Charles Thomas A Stonemason's Legacy Restored", SSAC Bulletin, Vol. 14, No. 3, December 1989, Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada (SSAC), Ottawa.

What is a genealogist to do when he/she reads statements in popular and respected publications crediting another person with an achievement that we know proudly belongs to a relative? What if such statements are often written as absolute fact, yet contradictory to our own family history? What if every time one picks up a book or reads a magazine article about the subject in question, that glaring "mistake" is found. One might try to ignore them. But most family historians would do as much as possible to correct such inaccuracies. I was caught in just such a problem in the Spring and Summer of 1986. In my case the inaccuracy was a fully understandable case of mistaken identity. But because it appeared in print again and again, I grew increasingly frustrated. I decided to try to set the record straight.

It has always been the contention in our family that my maternal great-great-great uncle, a Welsh stonemason and master builder named Charles Thomas, THOMAS (1820-1867) executed the beautiful sandstone carvings on Victoria Hall in the town of Cobourg, Ontario.

In the late 1850's, the Town decided to erect an imposing and grand town hall. Noted Toronto architect Kivas Tully was commissioned to design a magnificent municipal building that according to the local newspaper, would reflect "not only our present standing but future greatness as well". Cobourg enjoyed a prosperous economic boom in that period. Tully designed a Palladian-Classical Revival style building that most architectural historians consider to be his masterwork. Construction began late in 1856. In September 1860, Victoria Hall was officially opened by Edward, Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII).

The building was adorned with finely detailed sandstone carvings, including a bearded faced gargoyle, lyre ornaments, scrolls, Corinthian capitals and cut stone (ashlar) walls. The building fell into disrepair over time and was inevitably threatened with demolition. In the early 1970's it was saved and its full restoration began.

Dozens of architectural journals and heritage magazines began paying a great deal of attention to this designated national landmark. Several magazine articles and books studied its construction. When writers referred to the stone carvings however, they confidently and consistently awarded the credit for the work to noted Toronto architect, William Thomas. One book on Early Cobourg written in 1973 stated: "the stone cutting contractor was no less than the firm of William Thomas... "

Another publication claimed:

"The design of Victoria Hall has been variously attributed to William Thomas and to Kivas Tully. There is

no doubt that Thomas was associated with the building, since the local paper in 1858 noted the 'carvings...are the work of Mr Thomas, contractor for the stone cutting..."

William Thomas was the designer of St Lawrence Hall, St Michael's Cathedral, the Don Jail in Toronto and Brock's Monument in Queenston, Ontario. It was my contention however, that William Thomas had absolutely nothing to do with either the design or construction of Victoria Hall. A clear case of mistaken identity had been made. Somehow, the record had to be set straight. Thus began several months of pain-staking research.

I began the project by collecting and reviewing all of the available information written we had about the Thomas line of our family. I set down on paper the full account of Charles Thomas life as we then knew it. Our version of the facts, generated through oral history, had always been that Thomas was born somewhere in Wales and that he became a skilled stonemason. In the mid 1850's he arrived at Cobourg C.W., accompanied by a team of Welsh stonecutters and his three year old, orphaned niece, my maternal great grandmother Mary Tomlins Thomas (1854-1937). We believed that she too had been born in Wales. We did not know the names of her parents. The story goes on to say that after the work on Victoria Hall was completed, Charles T. Thomas left Cobourg and sometime later, was killed on a bridge building project in the United States. At this point we had no details of the exact nature of his death.

For some reason, C.T. Thomas's young niece Mary stayed in Cobourg. She was put under the care of a charwoman at the house of a prominent local lawyer. Census records indicate that Mary became a seamstress when she grew up.

In July 1873 Mary Thomas married Thomas James Wark (1845-1913), ironically the care-taker of Victoria Hall at the time. Thomas and Mary Wark lived in back quarters in the building and raised a large family. Among the children was my grandmother Clarice Wark-Romano (1892-1970).

Since almost every noted architectural historian including Peter John Stokes, Anthony Adamson and Thomas Ritchie had already awarded architect William Thomas the credit for Victoria Hall's stonework, my only chance of convincing them otherwise was to find solid original evidence to support our families' version of the facts.

I began the primary phase of my research by focusing on the few surviving original sources (day books, architectural plans etc.) related to the construction of Victoria Hall. Unfortunately, these papers were of little help since in every case when the stone contractor's name was mentioned, they referred to only a: "Mr Thomas".

I also examined minutes of Cobourg town council meeting from 1856 to 1859 and the Cobourg Star newspapers from the same period. Again, both sources referred to this "Mr Thomas" and as such, were inconclusive. The Cobourg Star for July 7, 1857 simply said:

"... a vast amount of stone cutting has been accomplished...The carvings on the spandrels of the chief entrance are exceedingly fine. They comprise the national emblems of the three United Kingdoms - the rose, the thistle, and the shamrock disposed on either side by an ancient lyre. **These carvings, together with the fine bearded face which forms the keystone of the arch are the work of Mr. Thomas, contractor for the stone cutting and they certainly do him very great credit.**"

To the best of my knowledge, historians relied exclusively on this vague newspaper reference when crediting William Thomas, as it had been quoted often and was cited in Edwin C. Guillet's seminal local history of Cobourg published in 1948. Making this claim more plausible is the fact that William Thomas was an apprentice stone cutter in his youth and so might have had the necessary skills to execute the stone work on Cobourg's Victoria Hall. Historians have also referred to the general similarity in carvings on William Thomas's buildings and Tully's Victoria Hall to further support the claim. It was apparently not considered possible that the newspaper might have been referring to another man in the building trade, with the last name Thomas.

As my research progressed, two points in my favour kept coming to mind. I thought it unlikely that an architect of William Thomas's stature at the time, would have worked as a stonemason on a project designed by one of his chief rivals, namely Kivas Tully. Architectural historians believe Tully was inspired in his designs for Victoria Hall by William Thomas's St Lawrence Hall constructed some five years earlier. In fact many experts including Peter Stokes, believe that Kivas Tully was determined to out-do Thomas' with his Victoria Hall designs. If this was indeed the case, why would Tully then have used William Thomas in his own game of 'one-up-manship'? It seemed to me that there were flaws in the accepted historical interpretation. I just had to find some relevant source that referred to the stonemason by his full name (hopefully Charles) to prove this.

In the summer of 1986 I made my first visit to the Ontario Archives in Toronto. I found the business papers of the general contractors for Victoria Hall, William and David Burnet,. Even here only the same inconclusive references to "Mr Thomas" were to be found. One such example is recorded in a letter dated, May 7, 1859 from the sandstone supplier, John Worthington of Toronto, addressed to general contractors on Victoria Hall, William and David Burnet. Worthington writes: "has Thomas finished up his work, how does his account stand?" (I later discovered that Charles T. Thomas had worked with Worthington Brothers on other projects, including Brock's Monument in Queenston).

Finally some progress was made. I tracked down three separate original Cobourg sources confirming that Charles T. Thomas did indeed live in Cobourg during the period of Victoria Hall's construction and that he worked as a stonemason. The Poll Book for the South Ward of Cobourg, dated December 31, 1857 listed:

C.T. Thomas/builder / Covert (St)

The Assessment Roll of the Town of Cobourg dated 1859 listed him in the West Ward as:

Charles T. Thomas / aged 39 / **stonecutter** / householder / King St.

Finally a deed made between Charles Thomas and Thomas Scott, the town postmaster, registered June 1, 1859 listed:

Charles Thomas, Thomas of the Town of Cobourg in the County of Northumberland and **marble cutter** of the first part...

Thomas and his wife Susan (the first reference to him having a wife) were selling property to Scott for 270 dollars. Unfortunately this new evidence could not specifically confirm that Thomas was working on

Victoria Hall while living in town.

For several weeks after my research stalled. Sources and leads seemed to dry up and I still had no information on Charles Thomas's life after his three year stay in Cobourg.

On a hunch, I went back to the Ontario Archives. We knew from the family oral history that Thomas died somewhere in the United States, sometime after his stay in Cobourg. I speculated that either he and his wife moved to the US in which case I would probably never track him down, or perhaps they continued to reside in Ontario and he merely took a temporary job in the States, where he was later killed. If the latter was the case, then his remains would almost certainly have been returned for burial. If he had a will it would have been probated in the Ontario Surrogate Court.

The Archives have microfilmed copies of the Court Clerk's index of individual probate applications (alphabetically by year), I hoped the index might provide me the year of Thomas's death, where he had resided in Ontario and possibly even his will. I scanned all the names beginning with the letter T after 1860 (the year Victoria Hall was completed).

To my absolute surprise I found his name under the year 1868. The application listed:

"Charles Thomas, Thomas / builder / having resided in **Ottawa** / dying on or about **December 26, 1867**/widow, Susan M. Thomas
The will was processed in Carleton County Court. "

Naturally I went to the Ottawa newspapers for 1867-68 in search of an obituary. In the Ottawa Citizen for January 3, 1868 I discovered:

"**THOMAS**-At Quincy, Illinois on Christmas Day. Charles Thomas, Thomas formerly of this city."

I remember thinking how sad that he died on Christmas day and so far away from home. But now at least I could confirm that he did die in the United States as we had always believed; and now we also knew where.

In the Ottawa Times issue for December 28, 1867 I finally landed upon that piece of evidence I had spent months searching for. I found a wonderfully detailed obituary chronically the career of Charles T. Thomas, including his work in Cobourg! It clearly states that Charles Thomas was a stonemason and builder, and most importantly, that he was a subcontractor working on the construction of the Town Hall in Cobourg:

"A short time since it became our painful duty to records a sad accident to our late fellow townsman, Mr. Charles T. Thomas, which rendered necessary the amputation of a leg. Subsequent to the amputation he suffered very greatly, and afterwards a fever set in which ended in death on Christmas Day. The remains will be brought to this city for interment, arriving next Tuesday morning. The funeral will be attended by the Masons and members of the St. George's Society, of which due notice will be given. The deceased gentleman was, during the erection of the Department Buildings in this city, Chief Superintendent of Works, under Messrs. Jones, Haycock and Co., and in that capacity earned for himself a high reputation for zeal and integrity. He was a skilled and experienced stone mason, several years of his life having been passed in the employ of Messrs. Cubit and Co., the eminent contractors of London, England.

Mr. Thomas was sometime Superintendent of Public Works under the Imperial Government of Bermuda, which place he left for Canada about the year 1852; since then and up to the moment of the sad accident resulting in his death, he was engaged as subcontractor in the erection of many important buildings on this continent. The present national monument at Queenston, reared by a grateful people to the memory of the "Gallant Brock", was erected under his supervision, so was the Montreal Bank and **Town Hall in Cobourg**, the latter considered to be one of the handsomest buildings in the Dominion. The subject of our notice was in every respect an excellent man...."

It is fair to conclude that he was, without doubt, the contractor for the stonework considering what the Assessment Roll, Poll Book and Deed list as his occupation while living in Cobourg. Charles Thomas Thomas was responsible for Victoria Hall's magnificent stone carvings.

The obituary also gave me a wealth of fascinating new information about a relative our family really knew little about.

Additional research into the information found in his obituary has been fruitful. His employer in England, was Thomas Cubitt's & Company, one of England's most powerful building firms in the Victorian era. Thomas began working for them in the late 1830's. Cubitt's were responsible for erecting the east front of Buckingham Palace in the 1840's. In 1845 Cubitt's built Osborne House on the Isle of Wight for Queen Victoria and they also planned Belgravia Square in London.

I later learned that while in Bermuda, Thomas was Foreman of Works on the construction of the British Royal Naval Dockyards.

Charles Thomas was a contractor on the construction of Brock's Monument at Queenston Heights, C.W. (1853). Incidentally, this monument was designed by architect William Thomas. Here he was evidently working for or with Worthington Brothers, a prominent Toronto building contracting firm.

While in Cobourg Charles Thomas was also contractor for the stonework on a beautiful stone Bank of Montreal (later to be the Post Office) being built at the same time as Victoria Hall. The bank was designed in the Italianate style by Montreal architect James Howard Springle and dressed on Ohio sandstone.

The Departmental Buildings referred to, are the East and West Blocks of the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa, constructed between 1859 and 1867. This must have been Thomas's next project after Victoria Hall.

I have also learned the details of Charles Thomas's death in 1867. He was Master stonemason on the construction of stone foundations for a massive iron bridge over the Mississippi River near Quincy, Illinois. This was the first iron bridge erected over that river and was designed by Thomas Curtis Clarke, a partner in the Port Hope contracting firm Jones, Haycock and Company; the same firm that hired Thomas to work on the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa. On October 26, 1867, Thomas was overseeing the lifting of some massive boulders by a makeshift derrick. The derrick collapsed and rocks fell on Thomas, crushing his left leg. He was taken back to his boarding house in Quincy. The leg was amputated. He appeared to rally for a time, but "fever" eventually set in. Charles Thomas died at midnight, Christmas Day, 1867. He was only 47 years old. His body was returned to Ottawa for burial in Sandy Hill Cemetery.

In the summer of 1986, I submitted my initial findings from this project, to the Canadian Inventory of Historic Buildings, Canadian Parks Service, Ottawa asserting that Charles Thomas was the contractor for the stone work on Cobourg's Victoria Hall and not William Thomas as widely accepted. This was part of their response:

"The Ottawa Times obituary notice is...a happy find, and seems to set the matter to rest. I have...filed your information in our own research files; from now on, at least, we'll be able to give Charles T. Thomas his full due when we write about Victoria Hall."

More recently I have learned that while in Cobourg, Thomas established a stone and marble works. He advertised in the local newspaper that he could design and carve gravestones, monuments, marble mantle pieces and washstands: "in the New York style...cheap for cash". He also offered to supply Ohio cut stone dressing for buildings and also prepare estimates for "all kinds of building work." One such monument, a magnificently carved sandstone tombstone with a 'St. Patrick's Cross', is located in Cobourg's St. Peter's Anglican Cemetery. It was carved by C.T. Thomas in August 1858 to mark the grave of a young man named Thomas Lloyd. Charles Thomas carved his name into the lower right-hand corner of the base of the tombstone, which is still standing to this day.

While engaged in a related project, I stumbled upon an interesting bit of history in the Ottawa newspapers. On November 1, 1864, the contractors on the Parliament Buildings hosted a gala luncheon in the half-built Centre Block, for the Delegates of the Quebec Conference (Canada's future Fathers of Confederation). John A. MacDonald, A.T. Galt, S.L. Tilley and the like, were present. Charles T. Thomas was also present.

In 2008 I learned a bit more about that Charles T. Thomas and his family. He came from a long line of stonemasons and builders. His brothers were in these trades, as was his father, also named Charles Thomas.

Mary Tomlins Thomas was the daughter of Frederick Thomas and Mary Tomlins. They married in 1853 and lived in central London. They both died about 1855 and young Mary lived where her uncle Richard until Charles T. Thomas brought her to Canada in 1857.

Endnotes:

1 Peter John Stokes chapter on the restoration of Victoria Hall in Victorian Cobourg - A 19th Century Profile, (Mika Publishing, Belleville, 1976) p. 35

Mr Stokes was one of the skilled restoration architects responsible for Victoria Hall's rebirth.

2 Thomas Ritchie, Architecture Canada Magazine, May 1967

Note: Other historians attributing the stone work to Toronto architect William Thomas include:

Anthony Adamson & Marian MacRae in their fine book Cornerstones of Order (1983), Howard V. Walker in an article he wrote on William Thomas in the Feb/Mar 1984 issue of Canada Century Home, Stephen Beszedits in his book Eminent Toronto Architects of the Past (1983), and Environment Canada-Parks publication, Town Halls of Canada(1987) by Margaret Carter et al.

3 Cobourg Star, July 7, 1858

4 Eric Ross Arthur in his book St Lawrence Hall,(Toronto: T. Nelson & Sons, 1969) p. 145, also questioned this unlikely scenerio writing:

It is true that earlier in the century, the architect (William Thomas) was only emerging from the building trades, but it is unlikely that Thomas, the colleague of such Toronto worthies as Lt. Col. Frederick Cumberland, Thomas Fuller, who designed the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa, Sir Sandford Fleming...or John G. Howard who gave us High Park, would have added stone-cutting to his practice as an architect.

5 Peter Stokes, Victorian Cobourg – A 19th Century Profile, p.33

6 Archives of Ontario

7 I never did locate Charles T. Thomas's will. I later discovered that there was a devastating fire in the Carleton County Court House years ago, that destroyed such records.

8 Ottawa Times, December 28, 1867

9 Bermuda Pocket Almanac, 1851

10 Cobourg Star, November 18, 1857 & Jim Leonard, Thomas Curtis Clarke. An Outstanding Civil Engineer from Port Hope, Ontario (1988)

11 Jim Leonard, Thomas Curtis Clarke – An Outstanding Civil Engineer From Port Hope, Ontario, (1988)

12 Quincy Daily Herald, October 27, & December 27, 1867

13 Cobourg Star, August 3, 1859 stored in the Baldwin Room,
Metro Toronto Reference Library

14 The Cobourg Star, September 15, 1858 added:

"this beautiful monument consists of an upright block of Ohio free-stone, most **admirably carved by Mr Thomas, whose ability as a Sculptor has already been displayed upon our Town Hall ...** we cannot but express our sincere hope and desire that the erection of this truly ornamental monument may be the means of introducing a better and mores tasteful style of gravestone than at present encumbers and disfigures our public cemeteries".

15 Jim Leonard, Thomas Curtis Clarke, (1988).

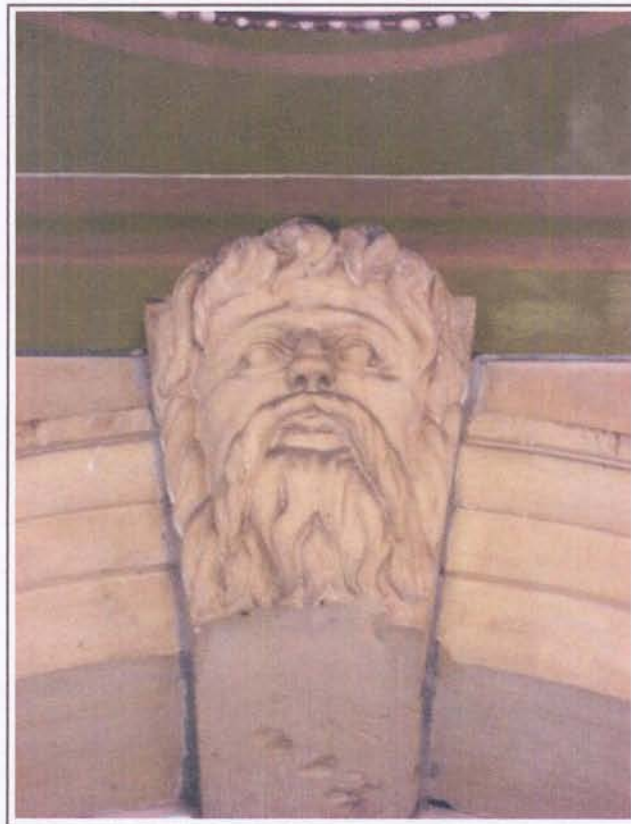
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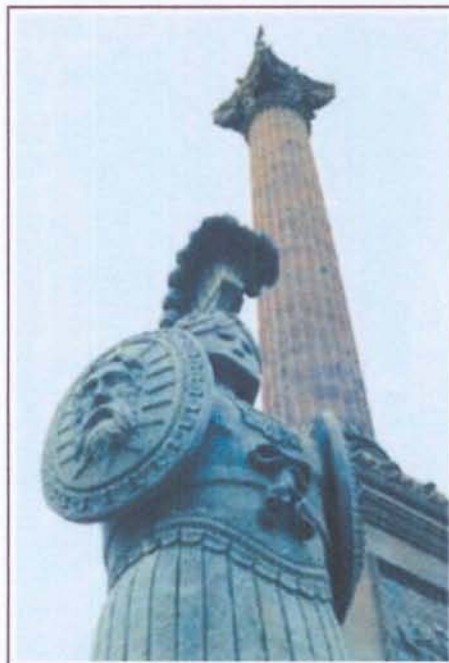


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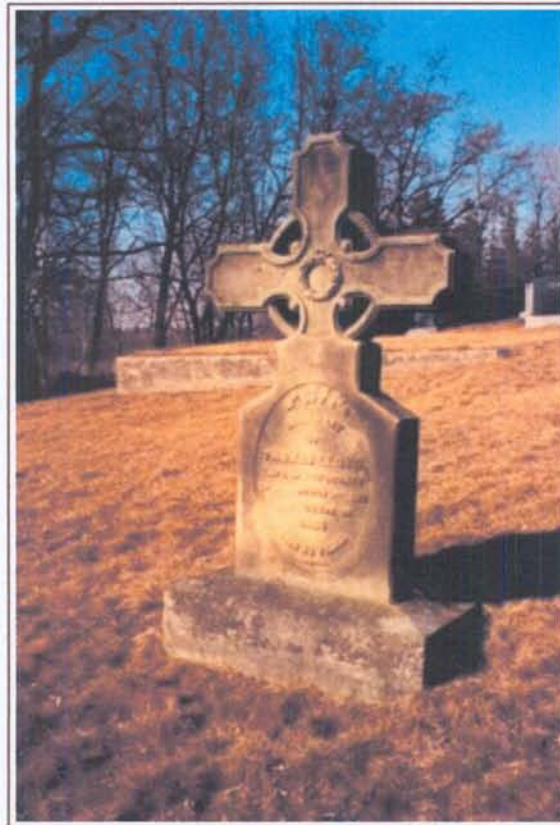


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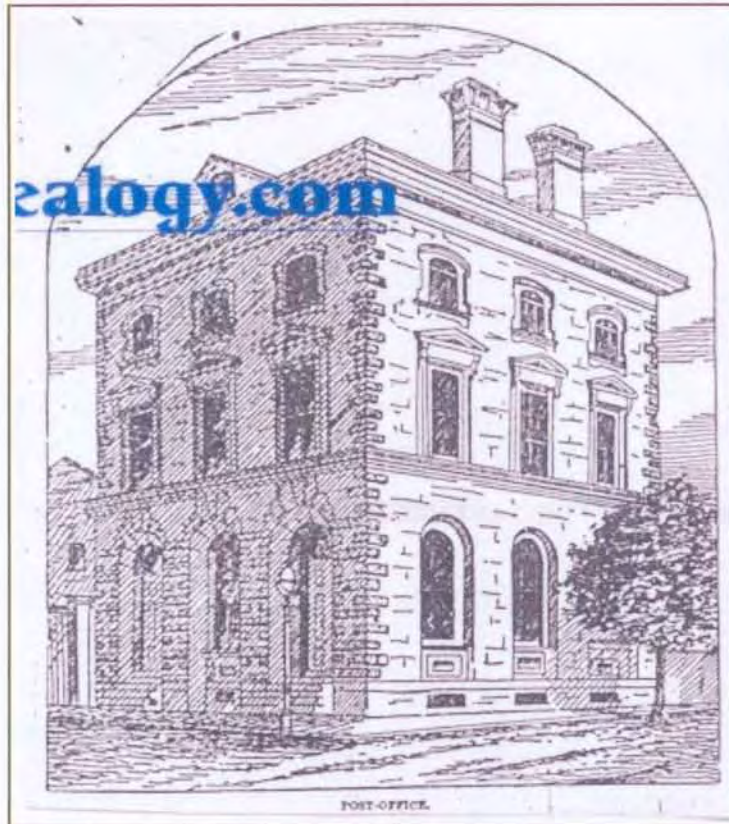


CT Thomas stone 1858



CT Thomas Quincy Bridge





Cobourg Bank of Montreal CT Thomas



East Blk Ottawa CT Thomas





West Block Ottawa CT Thomas



Stone masons East Block Ottawa CT Thomas





Victoria Hall ca. 1860



stonework Victoria Hall detail shot



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