

THE TOWNSEND FAMILY OF "OAKLANDS"

Thomas Brook Townsend was born in the village of Kirby, Yorkshire England in 1834 and came to Canada in 1857. He married Hannah Greening, youngest daughter of Nathaniel Greening of Warrington, England in 1858 and they made their home in Aldershot Ontario, on the property "The Hill", overlooking Hidden Valley.

A civil Engineer he was closely associated with the engineering dept. of the Great Western Ry. (later the Grand Trunk Ry.), his first assignment being the rebuilding of the bridge over the Desjardines Canal to replace the one destroyed in the great Desjardines canal disaster in 1857. In 1860 he designed and built the special private car which the late King Edward VII, then Prince of Wales used during his visit to Canada in that year. In 1872 he entered the service of the Dominion Government, in the Department of Railways and Canals. His principal work during the next nine years was the designing of the new Welland Canal locks, gates and bridges. In 1881 he severed his connections with the Government and successfully tendered for the contract for building and stepping the lock gates in 1882.

In politics he was a staunch Conservative and contested North Wentworth in the interests of the Conservative Party in the general election of 1887 but was defeated by the late Thomas Bain of Dundas, Ont.

In 1889 when the "Oaklands" property at Aldershot was offered at auction Mr. Townsend purchased it. This was crown land deeded to Lt. Alex MacDonal 1796.

The deed shows a number of transfers. Some of the names recorded being Mr. Applegath (or garth), Leopold Bauer 1881, Valaucy Fuller 1881, J.N. Teetzel 1889, Thomas B. Townsend 1889. Later 20 acres was sold to Otto Schoan (or Achojan).

The Townsends did not occupy "Oaklands" until 1899 during which time vandals broke into the buildings, several houses and barns, causing much destruction. The big house was situated in the heavily wooded area on the bay shore. All lead plumbing had been stolen, windows were smashed and floors ruined during the ten years the house had been vacant.

There was a flag pole on the Oaklands property and this was said to mark the spot where treasure had been buried on the north shore. Children digging for the treasure unearthed an old wooden box but found no treasure.

Another place of interest was the high sand bank overlooking the water, known as "Dead Man's Hill". An old gravestone "Watkins" identified some exposed bones and it was thought it might be a private burying ground, however nothing more was discovered. These bones were reinterred but as more land crumbled away they were moved back and the plot was known as "The Place of the Restless Bones".

The house at the gate on Plains Road was occupied by Mrs. Margaret Keogh and family for many years. It was destroyed by fire during