

Mount Fortune outlived its woolen mill neighbor

By Peggy Wright

Set back from Tremaine Street, masked by a thorny hedge and tall trees, stands the huge and impressive home built by Stuart MacKechnie around 1843.

It was named Mount Fortune by a successive owner, James B. Fortune, a local politician and sherrif of Cobourg from 1862 to 1869.

Three MacKechnie brothers and a Captain Wallace (men of means, states an historical reference) arrived in Cobourg from Scotland in 1843. Stuart MacKechnie and Wallace purchased the Ham estate on Factory Creek, a large tract of land on the west bank.

On the site of an old grist mill, where the *Cobourg Daily Star* building now stands, the brothers and John Sinclair Wallace, a son of the captain, built the Ontario Woollen Mills.

The house is located directly across from the mill site and was built around the same time.

The woollen mill was soon the largest of its kind in British North America. It was vast in size and operation, and within two years, it was employing 50 people and producing over 64,000 yards of cloth a year.

By 1856, the employees numbered 200, and the mill was turning out 800 yards a day.

Stuart, according to historical references, was the driving force behind the business, and his

Building history

death, coupled with the fact that Wallace pulled out of the business, caused a severe financial crisis which led to foreclosure by the Bank of Montreal.

The mills passed through several hands after this time, retaining its former stature in the cloth trade, and eventually became the Cooley Rifle Factory.

According to local historian Rob Mikel, the house which MacKechnie built was originally a two-and-a-half storey red brick residence, one of the finest examples of Greek Revival architecture in Cobourg.

A Cobourg map of 1850 shows the addition of a north wing, and an 1860 map depicts a further addition.

It is believed that these wings housed an officers' mess used by the Cobourg Militia during the Fenian raids, when a number of Irish Americans and other anti-Britishers threatened from south of the border. These raids apparently did not amount to much as far as battles go, but caused a great deal of excitement (according to Guillet's *Cobourg 1798-1948*).

An interesting feature of the house is the off-centre recessed front door. Originally it contained an "internal" entrance, which was enclosed by a porch in later years.

The porch has doors which can fold back during the summer or



Mount Fortune, built around 1843, is one of the most impressive and interesting houses on Tremaine Street.

remain in place during the colder winter months.

The residence also boasts flush eaves on the main gable, which is decorated by a monumental cornice (or ornamental moulding). The other two gables are similar in construction.

The south facade has two blind

windows which retain the symmetry of the building.

It is altogether a grand dwelling, especially considering that the location was considered by some to be "on the wrong side of town." The east end of Cobourg was thought to have been where the gentry resided.

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