

# The day the Widows gang seized the town hall

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fortune, however, as the work progressed the following year. A number of people were raising some heavy timber to the upper portion of the factory when the beam on which they were standing broke, and they were hurled down 30 feet to the cellar. Three men were killed, and many more were injured. The building was finished, but fire struck again in 1875. Charles' son Benajah now became the proprietor and rebuilt it on a grander scale: two and a half stories high and powered by a 40-horsepower waterwheel.

"Not wanting to tempt fate again, the building was heated by steam and equipped with a system of waterworks for quenching fires. Not only did it provide employment for 50 to 60 hands directly, it also used 450 pounds of Canadian wool daily."

The Glen's woolen mill witnessed financial ebbs and flows in the years that followed, eventually being taken over in 1894 by the Sykes and Ainley Manufacturing Company, which maintained ties with the Williams family through the wife of general manager Harry Holdroyd, who was a daughter of Joseph Williams.

"The Glen Woolen Mills Company Ltd. was organized in 1907 to carry on the business. Most of the partners of this company lived in England, with H.P. Lawson of Georgetown (vice-president) and E. Y. Barraclough (who came about 1911 as secretary-treasurer) as the only Canadian directors.

"The Melrose Knitting Company was set up as a subsidiary. It produced about 45,000 dozen pairs of men's wool socks and lumbermen's socks a year. Sixty to 70 people worked there, and a hundred could have been employed if they could be found. Because of the shortage of labour, 12 English automatic machines were installed; they seemed to be possessed of almost human intelligence and, with the care of two boys, they knit 60 dozen pairs of socks a day. After Barraclough's death, the mill passed through a number of operators and was destroyed by fire in 1964."

**BEAUMONT ARRIVES**  
In 1882, Samuel Beaumont, who had seen both good and bad fortune in the wool trade, bought a second woolen mill from its founder and owner, James Bradley. Fire, which had already claimed the mill Beaumont had operated in Norval, struck his Glen mill shortly after, almost claiming the life of Beaumont himself. He rebuilt the factory, furnishing it with the best English machinery he could find.

"Though the river provided the power that attracted the first villagers and gave rise to infant industries, it was not the Glen's only resource, nor even a lasting one. It was not just the advent of new forms of energy, like steam engines and gasoline motors and hydro power from a distance, which stole the river's importance. A saw mill, for example, was important as long as there were ancient trees to be felled. But as the land was cleared and the grain was planted where once there had been forests, there was naturally

less lumber to be cut. Besides, it was not unusual for a kerosene lamp to be knocked over or a spark to escape from the fireplace. If you lived in a frame house, your home could very quickly go up in flames.

"So people thought of brick homes and of stone mills with more confidence. Brickmaking was usually a local industry and the Historical Atlas shows brickyards on either side of the road going out of the village, just before the 10th line."

Stone from the Glen area was used for the Peace Bridge between Fort Erie and Buffalo, for post office buildings from Gananoque to Lake Huron, for the Parliament buildings in Toronto and Casa Loma.

Rev. Ruggie began researching his history in the small cemetery which overlooks the Glen. There, the oldest grave marker he could find bore the name of Benajah Williams' son Ira, who died in 1833, just eleven days after his 15th birthday. Nearby is the grave of another son, George, who died three years later when he was just 23.

The cemetery site was chosen by the Williams family in keeping with the rural tradition which would see farmers and early settlers simply choose a burial ground for their

relatives. Others besides the Williams have since used the cemetery, of course.

The grave of old Benajah Williams himself is marked by a limestone block dated 1851. Donations of land by two local industries, including Sheridan Nurseries, have expanded the cemetery to its present area.

### JONES TO BONES

By the mid-1860s, another son of Benajah's, Isaac, had established a woodworking firm which specialized in chairs and cabinets but sideling in coffins. Rev. Ruggie's history records an amusing incident which could have just as easily happened to Isaac.

A Milton furniture dealer of the same era, Benjamin Jones, advertised "Coffins made to order on short notice." The ad was not so odd as it sounds today, since some people kept their coffins ready for when they were needed. But the typesetters mistakenly changed the undertaker's name from B. Jones to E. Jones."

Funeral services during the last century were sometimes held in the undertaker's shop, but more often the body would be kept at the home of relatives and the service would take place either there or in the church.

"On the way to the cemetery, stores would close down while the funeral passed. Harold Wheeler always turned

off the lights of the general store in the Glen when a procession passed on its way up the cemetery hill. The custom may have had its origins many centuries ago during the plague years, when people would close their shutters when bodies were taken by.

"William Watkins sold things not now considered as groceries: crockery, glassware and liquor. He was postmaster and had another sideline: 'He also attends to the wants of those matrimonially inclined by furnishing them with the necessary licence'. Assuming, of course, that those matrimonially inclined had a prospective spouse: in 1865, one lady resident of the village advertised in The Canadian Champion for a husband.

"Not everyone approved of the liquor business, and the Glen had its own temperance organization, the Good Templars (Royal Oak Temple 552). It was in part the active support of this group that enabled the village to proceed with their plans in 1870 to erect a town hall. After the inevitable delays, the new brick hall was opened on the 24th of May, 1871, with a concert to liquidate the debt.

"The hall was much used, not just for meetings, but also for parties and concerts, and

practices, church services and Sunday schools."

### WIDOWS GANG

In the winter of 1878, "an ex-monk named Widows spent some time in the Glen and in other towns in the area 'making himself generally notorious by preaching, lecturing accompanied by boisterous behaviour'. His followers would keep the town hall for

him to use after the church service and on one occasion the Georgetown constables attended church to prevent the 'Widows gang from holding the building after service. Once evicted, Widows mounted a wagon and haranged the assembled crowd until dark'.

A final note in Down in the Glen relates the story of how the village's name was changed from Williamsburg in 1852.

The introduction of a post office also brought an "end" to the name Glen Williams, however, when, in 1867, letter carrier service was established there and the Glen became Sub Post Office Three of Georgetown.

Although Glen residents were assured at the time that they could continue using the

name Glen Williams on their correspondence, the sub office has since closed and "Glen Williams" no longer officially exists, according to one postmaster who appraised the situation.

"To residents of the village, however," Rev. Ruggie's history concludes, "Glen Williams still exists, and is very much alive."



### BANKING ON HOLLYWOOD?

Veteran Canadian actor Mavor Moore (right) plays the bank manager of the State Bank of Madison in a scene from Never Trust an Honest Thief shot on Monday. Mr. Moore is pictured here with Dennis Strong who plays an IRS investigator in the film.

(Herald photo)

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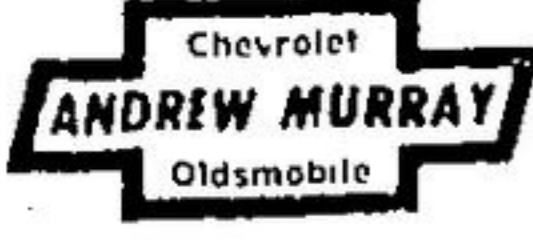
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