

*Tribute cont'd from pg. 9*

Other families included the Graysons, whose ancestor had opened the first bank, the Thorns, whose forebear was the Reverend William Markus Thorn, the first Rector of the Church of St. Anne, and the communities first teacher. He and the father of Jebediah Steele's wife, one August Asselstine, had opened the first school, a grammar school for young gentlemen on the site of what was now Weavers' Mills Consolidated Secondary School.

Then there was Humphrey Bolton, a young millwright who had come from England to install the mechanical looms that would weave the wool into cloth, and had met and married an indentured serving woman, Bridget Shannon. He bought her indenture, then risking all, gave her the option of setting up a little dress making shop or marrying him. She married him and they too produced a family, six children in all, and prospered in this new world.

On the upper side of the mill pond and the River Nore were built the grand houses, their lawns running down almost to the water. Across the pond, the mills crouched their grey stone blending in with the water that lapped the moss covered foundations. Samuel, had hired an British Army surveyor to lay out the lower town. He had insisted that each worker's lot should include enough space for a kitchen garden, a few chickens and a stable for a horse, thus each lot was a half acre in size. In the tradition of the British workers' house, and in the name of economy, for slate for the rooves had to be brought in, the houses were built long and narrow, with two storeys and an attic. He argued that he saved half again as much roof slate while affording sufficient living space for worker and his family. The lots too, were long and narrow.

As Hilda had assured those who would read this little history, Samuel and Jebediah, did not house their workers and provide so well for their needs out of any sense of philanthropy, but out of good business practices. A contented, well housed, fairly treated work force would not be prone to the unrest and rioting that recurred frequently in Britain, but would be hard working and loyal, and those who were not, would not be there. This philosophy had held off all attempts at unionizing the mills right up to their closing nearly two hundred years later.

From what was for the time; or for the present time, as Hilda had observed; a very progressive attitude toward labour, had sprung a community dedicated to hard work and personal initiative, but very conservative in its adoption of less positive aspects of modern society. Marriage was forever, with divorce considered scandalous in the extreme. Women who sought employment to augment the family income or to support themselves, were considered less fortunate for having to do so, and although a woman could work at teaching or nursing until she had a family, it was a brave woman who continued to work while her children were small and needed her nurturing. Consequently, of recent years, the towns greatest export had been its young women, who went off in search of careers, where to do so was not only considered unexceptional, but praiseworthy.

And that brought Hilda's thoughts to Amy Thorn. Amy's mother, Beth Wells, as she had been when she and Hilda went to school together, had been a girl who had always planned to have a career. Plans that she and Hilda discussed sharing their hopes. Beth's parents were killed in a car accident just before Beth's high school graduation, but Beth had gone on with her plans to attend Queen's University, eventually earning a degree of Bachelor of Science, Honours Chemistry. William Thorn was also attending Queen's at the time, earning a degree in Chemical Engineering. The match between William and Beth had seemed ideal, they having so many interests in common. Both had similar backgrounds and even back in the past, a common ancestor. Hilda, even then, thought that William was a bit stuffy, and felt that as long as Beth did not challenge his superiority in their chosen career, their life would go well. William had never liked to be beaten at anything. He had to be the best.

Because of the attitude in the community toward women with small children working, Hilda had not been at all surprised when Beth had resigned her post as a research assistant to stay at home and raise Amy. That was the natural thing to do. And as Amy grew older and less in need of her mother's presence at home, Beth had enrolled in a refresher course at Queen's, driving there every day, with the idea of searching for a post similar to the one she had held before Amy's birth. What a pity she had died before she could realize this ambition.

Hilda put the papers down and picked up her forgotten cup of coffee. That was two friends she had lost over the years. Two of the women with whom she had shared her growing up. In a way, that made those remaining more cherished. And now there was only Pearl, although they had not shared the same closeness for the Steeles had sent this last remaining offspring of the line of Jebediah and Josephine, to private schools. They had had their summers together, however, and had corresponded throughout the school year. In many ways, their relationship had been more intimate, for as is the way with letters, one expresses oneself without thought to ridicule or censure. A freedom of expression that exists only rarely in face to face conversation.

There had always been a bond between the Steeles and the Alexanders, Hilda's ancestors. It had been from Major Joshua Alexander's land grant that the Steeles had purchased the block of land upon which Weavers' Mills stood. The Steeles and the Major had met in Kingston, the Major and his wife on their way to develop the land grant he had been given for service to the crown, and the Steeles in search of a location for their mill. They had travelled up the lake to just before it began to narrow to meet the St. Lawrence River. Before they returned to Kingston, a deal had been struck. The Steeles would buy a block of fifty acres to the west of the pond and along the River Nore from the Major and together they would have the land surrounding the pond and the river on both sides surveyed and laid out for a town.

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