

PRESCOTT STREET

Although now the main street of Kemptville, before 1840 it was just a cleared area south of the river where cows grazed around the corner of Prescott and Asa Streets. From that point, the trail to Prescott ran through heavy bush, through which the mail often had to be carried on foot, the trail being too difficult at times even for horses. By 1870 the street was occupied by an impressive range of wood framed buildings containing hotels, blacksmith shops, doctors' offices and stores. On May 13, 1872, all of this was burned away in the worst fire in Kemptville's history. The entire street, from Asa to Water street was destroyed, as every building on both sides of the street went up in flames. Prescott Street today dates from after that dreadful catastrophe. This tour covers the oldest part of the Prescott Street area, as far south as Asa Street.

1. Bridge and Mills



This is the core of Kemptville, the location of the first buildings and entire raison d'etre of the town. The river here was once wider and faster than it is today, and the Clothier family built grist and saw mills

here that attracted settlers, businesses and visitors to the new village in the 1820's. The first bridge was a couple of planks laid across the stream. Later bridges of wood, then iron, were in constant need of repair. Over the years, the river was narrowed and 'tamed', its power diverted to the use of foundries, woolen mills, cheese and timber factories. George Keating's mill above the bridge provided electric street lighting to the entire town. In 1891, he built a second mill across the river and built a second generating system that could operate by water or steam power. The age of electric street lighting had well and truly arrived and poles were erected along the main streets to carry the new wires. A concrete bridge was built in 1928, and replaced by the present structure in 1961.

2. The Hinton Block



This site was the location of a tannery established in the 1830's by Sandford and Hunton, later sold to Surragar Barnes, and for years was one of only two businesses on this side of the river. This building later

burned down and was not rebuilt. When the present structure was being built in 1902, the original vats and machinery of the tannery were uncovered. This building was built by George Perry for Robert Hinton, the architect being George Edward Wilson of Ogdensburgh, and has housed a wide variety of commercial operations since then. It has also contained residential units on the upper floors. A white frame building used to stand between this Block and the river, and housed a Chinese laundry, the building overhanging the river and using its water to clean clothes. The Holmes Block is made of brick, with iron girders throughout, an imposing and solid structure anchoring the north end of the street.

3. New Library Block



The site of the new Central Library has been a busy commercial location from the earliest days of Kemptville. William Blackburn built his home on this land in the 1830's, commuting to his store

across the river. By the time of the Great Fire of 1872, a number of small wood-frame buildings occupied the site, and these were the only wood buildings to survive the fire. The Stitts family occupied much of the block, with a restaurant at the bridge end, and a brick grocery store at the corner of Water Street. This building is seen in the photograph, when it was run by A. M. Parkinson. This building burned to the ground in 1955 and the property bought by the Town of Kemptville. The restaurant was run by the Crawfords in the 1950's. Other businesses operating on this block over the years included a bakery, a feed store, blacksmiths and dress shops.

4. Wallace Block, Prescott and Water St.



Kernahan & Wood opened a store along this block of Water Street in 1833. They had a wharf at the end of Thomas Street. Their's was a general store, also selling their timber products. The building was destroyed in the 1872 fire. John

R. Wallace, a merchant tailor who came from North Gower c. 1888, built the Wallace Block in 1901. It was the office of the Union Bank of Canada and housed the Willis Business College upstairs. The Dominion Department of Agriculture, Dairy Produce Grading Branch was located in Kemptville in

1935. The work consisted of testing and grading all cheese and butter in the district extending from Brockville to Ottawa to VanKleek Hill. Sam Lecker took over the building in 1948 and ran a store there for 35 years. Later, the Jonquil Tea Rooms were located here, operated by the McGuigan sisters but owned by Lemis Sykes. Patrons entered by the corner door beside which was a large teapot made of flat boards cut to shape, by way of advertisement.

5. Old Post Office Site Prescott & Reuben Streets



Before the fire of 1872, John Magee, a tailor, had a store on this site. After the fire, he built a new stone building and carried on his business there until 1895. This was also the location of the very first Library in Kemptville, after 1900. The building was taken over by

the Bank of Ottawa in 1895, the first banking institution in Kemptville. The Bank of Ottawa later became amalgamated with the Bank of Nova Scotia. The Bank moved premises further up Prescott St. in 1910, and, after a fire in 1915 which destroyed the Mundle & Percival store next door, it became the site of the new Post Office and Cenotaph. The Post Office was designed by David Ewart, who was Chief Dominion Architect from 1896 to 1914. The Post Office must have been one of his last designs in that position. A square tower on the building had four clock faces, one facing in each direction. On the rear of the upper portion of the building was a bell,



and a large hammer rang out the hours. This building became a landmark in Kemptville for decades, before being demolished in 1970. The cenotaph had

been moved to the High School grounds the previous year. The once busy corner lot is now a quiet green space.

6. The Post Office, Reuben Street

There was a moving picture house on this site before 1921, opened by the Bowen family, and later carried on by Paul Bedell, who went bankrupt. It was run then by Richmond Theatre Ltd., until 1929, when it finally closed and the building was turned into law offices. But, in 1949, Vincent Kelly, from Ottawa, bought the premises and reopened a movie theatre there. The Empress Theatre provided movies to the people of North Grenville until Christmas, 1959, when it finally closed



for lack of business. The building was bought by Ralph Raina, who renovated it into a storage space and later a store. In 1967, Raina sold the site to the Crown and the Empress was

finally demolished to make way for the present Post Office building, which replaced the one at the corner of Prescott Street in 1970.

7. The CIBC Site, Prescott & Reuben Streets

This is yet another important site in Kemptville's history



that hides its past well. The first school house in the area was opened here in 1822 and run by Reuben Chase for over 20 years. The land was donated by Asa Clothier, who retained ownership until the school closed. The

site was occupied by the Holmes family for many years, and one of the Holmes daughters married Samuel Martin, a photographer. Before the Great Fire, Martin's Photography occupied the site, and was rebuilt afterwards, an early pioneer of the business. An even more modern studio was opened here by D. Edson Pelton, in 1895. After his death in 1901, the business was continued by his brother. The fine brick building to the left of the Post Office in the picture, was built by Dr. David Wallace as a residence, and was later the home and office of Dr. G. D. Gordon, who came to Kemptville in 1919. The parking lot for the CIBC was the site of Dr. Gordon's garage, a stable for his team of horses, and storage sheds. The property was bought by the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce in 1980 and the residence was replaced by the bank building that stands on the corner today.

8. Kemptville Town Hall, 15 Water St.

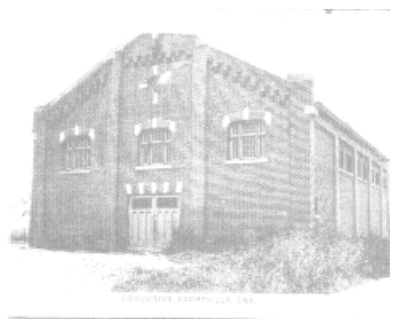
In 1873, the Corporation of the Town of Kemptville bought a parcel of land on South Water Street from the McIntyres, Helen Scott and Ambrose Clothier on which they built a new Town Hall for Kemptville. Over the years, the building contained an upstairs Court House, and offices of various Town



departments. Council meetings were held here until after amalgamation in 1998, when the Municipal Offices moved to the new Municipal Centre.

The Fire Department occupied part of this building from about 1881, and renovations were made to accommodate the fire trucks. There was a special fire dock on the river. The Fire Department moved to the old Armoury building in 1968. A tall tower for hanging fire hoses up to dry was a landmark of the Town until it was damaged by fire in 1935, and later demolished in 1957. In front of the building were the Municipal Scales, on which were weighed wagons and goods. This was the official weigh station when goods such as hay were being bought. The town charged a fee for this service. In 1937, an extension to the building was erected at the rear to house the new Kemptonville Hydro Electric Commission. The Town Hall was a meeting place for various societies and organisations in Kemptonville, and was the location for concerts and practice sessions for the Kemptonville Band over the decades. The building is of solid stone construction and remains the location for Court sessions in North Grenville (now on the ground floor).

9. The Armoury - Old Fire Hall



Erected at the edge of Riverside Park about 1912, Sir Sam Hughes Armouries, was built by Robert Beggs of Hallville and possibly designed by David Ewart. It is very similar in design to Armouries in other Canadian towns.

In the fall of 1919 the Kemptonville Branch of the Great War Veterans Association was formed and they were allowed to hold their weekly meetings here. There was a firing range in the basement where the High School Cadets had rifle practice and the hall was sometimes used for dances. In 1968, the Fire Hall was moved here from the Town Hall, and the building was renovated to accommodate the trucks. It remained a Fire Hall until 2009.

10. McPherson House - Scotiabank

In 1840, the corner of Prescott and Asa streets marked the far south end of Kemptonville, a place where cattle were graz-



ing at the edge of the bush. By the 1860's there was a general store run by William Dyer. This site later became the location of a major hotel, first run by Thomas Adams and later known as the Selleck Hotel.

The Great Fire of 1872 destroyed the building, which was almost immediately rebuilt, this time in stone, and continued as a hotel until 1939, when it was again burned to the ground. In 1889 it was bought by George McPherson who developed it into the largest hotel in the area, and "one of the finest in the country". The building was 35x80, facing both Prescott and Asa streets, and was three stories high, with impressive furnishings and facilities. On New Year's Eve, 1939, the Allen Hotel, as it then was, burned down and was never rebuilt. The site became Johnston's Garage for a number of years before that business moved to Rideau St and the site was bought by the Bank of Nova Scotia, which had been located across the street in the Bank of Ottawa building.

11. The Bank of Ottawa Building



This building dates from about 1909, when the Bank of Ottawa moved to this location from further down the street. The land was bought from Anderson & Langstaff, owners of much of the land south of this lot.

The Bank of Ottawa amalgamated with the Bank of Nova Scotia in 1919, and remained on this site until 1978, when they moved across the street to their current location. The building has served as a commercial operation ever since.

12. Blackburn's Store

In recent years, this building has been known as Anderson's and as the Red and White. It has been the site of a store since at least 1850, when Thomas Baldwin had a cabinet shop here. It then became the general store of Andrew Blackburn, and it was another of the victims of the 1872 fire. Blackburn rebuilt in brick after the fire. Designed by King Arnoldi, who had worked on the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa, and was the architect of the oldest building on Sparks Street in Ottawa, that building, pictured here, became one of the first and largest department stores in the town of Kemptonville. Extended on the north side, and with extensive warehouses, stables and sheds at the rear and the south, the business



was bought out by an employee, William H. Anderson, who further expanded it. In 1897, he took on a partner, Andrew Langstaff in order to handle the increased business. The

building is 30' x 80' and, with other buildings, the firm occupied 20,000 square feet in 1900. A novel feature of the building was a windmill-operated water pump, which was located where the driveway is today. It pumped water into a large tank from which customers and others could water their horses.

13. Butler's Victorian Pantry 126 Prescott St.



William H. Cochrane opened a harness and saddlery business on this site in 1868, complete with a manufacturing section and store. It was destroyed in the 1872 fire, but he rebuilt and this building is the result. Cochrane was very involved in the life of Kemptonville over the years, serving on the School Board for 27 years, and as an elder in the Presbyterian Church almost as long. The building was sold by his widow in 1916, after almost forty years in this location. It has since been a jewelry store, an ice-cream shop, a bakery and an art gallery. It is currently the home of Butler's Victorian Pantry tea rooms.

Researched and written by Dr. David Shanahan

NORTH GRENVILLE WALKING TOURS

KEMPTVILLE



Prescott Street

