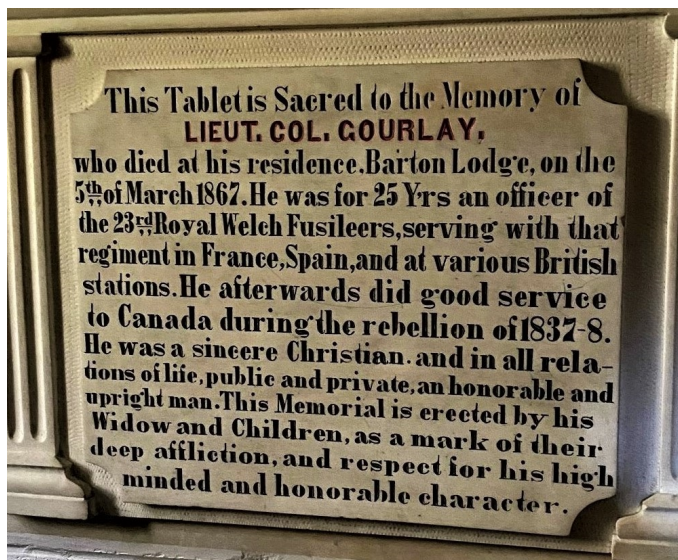


Remembering Col. Wm Gourlay

By Robert Williamson

This Mountain News column has proven time and again that Mountain residents are fascinated with their local heritage. Phil Seagrove, Manager of Cresmount Funeral Home on Fennell Avenue, grew up on the West Mountain and wanted to provide an added degree of dignity to each of his funeral viewing rooms. In keeping with the Cresmount theme, “***Every Detail Remembered***”, he identified each room with a prominent Mountain heritage title like: Buchanan, Burkholder, Bruce, Beckett and Gourlay.

You can imagine how thrilled he was to discover a large memorial plaque dedicated to the memory of Lieutenant Colonel William Gourlay, mounted on the entry wall of Holy Trinity Anglican Church located just west of the funeral home on Fennell Avenue. He also knew that a west Mountain neighborhood, bounded by West 5th, Garth Street, Stone Church Road and the LINC Parkway was named Gourlay on a City Planning Department map.



Gourlay Memorial Tablet photo by Phil Seagrove.

While the plaque describes Gourlay's military service in the Napoleonic War in 1815 and the 1837 Rebellion in Upper Canada, what's missing is his connection to the Hamilton Mountain. At this point Mr. Seagrove came to me for consultation.

The Dictionary of Hamilton Biography, Volume 1 tells us that Gourlay emigrated to Canada in 1836, settling in Binbrook. He joined the Gore Militia as second in command under Allan MacNab becoming Lt. Colonel in command after MacNab's retirement in 1841. However, most important to our story is his marriage to Emily Whyte in 1850, reputedly the granddaughter of the Duke of Kent, father of Queen Victoria. The Gourlay family lived in the Barton Lodge villa on the escarpment edge overlooking

Beckett Drive. A royal connection was enhanced by a litany of prestigious visitors.

Since William Gourlay was an Anglican, it could be assumed that when he died in 1867, he was buried in St. Peter's Church Anglican Cemetery on Mohawk Road West located between Garth Street and Westcliffe Mall. However, that is not true. As a senior officer in the Gore Militia and later connections to Royalty, he was part of Hamilton's elite society and attended Christ's Church, the first dedicated Anglican Church in the lower city. Thus he is buried in Hamilton Cemetery on York Street.

He predeceased his wife Emily by 38 years. In 1877, a new Anglican Church, Holy Trinity, was built on the corner of Upper James (Caledonia Road) and Fennell Avenue within walking distance of the Barton Lodge estate. It is likely that the Gourlay family, his widow, two sons and a daughter, attended that church and the plaque was installed by them as so stated in the text. Mountain Plaza Mall stands on the site today. A new Holy Trinity Church was built in 1956, a block further east at 120 Fennell Avenue. The old plaque was rebuilt into the front foyer wall. As it represents over a century of Mountain heritage, we can be thankful that Mr. Seagrove is helping to ensure that “***Every Detail is Remembered.***”



Holy Trinity Church site of the Gourlay Plaque

Google Photo by D. Triggerson

Mountain Memories, written by historian Robert Williamson for the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society, appears monthly. <Hamiltonheritage.ca>