

DOWN MEMORY LANE by Robert Williamson

Hidden away in the prominent Centremount neighborhood at the top of the Claremont Access east of Upper James Street, you will find the innocuous sounding "Bull's Lane", wedged against the escarpment edge by streets with more ostentatious names like; Rosedene, Wycliffe, Harbourview and Belvidere. This is now the site of luxurious homes overlooking downtown Hamilton. One property in particular has witnessed a significant amount of Canadian history. This saga began in 1831 when an Irish printer/book publisher named George Perkins Bull emigrated to Canada. From Montreal he made his way west to York (Toronto) in 1834. It was a time of political turmoil in Upper and Lower Canada between the Tories and Reformers leading to the Rebellion of 1837 and Act of Union in 1841. Allan MacNab, a growing Tory political force in 1835, invited George Perkins Bull to establish the Hamilton Gazette, a semi-weekly newspaper promoting the Tory point of view. Like MacNab and other business-minded men he also invested in property with potential. When G.P. Bull died in 1847, the Gazette was absorbed by the Spectator and his Mountain brow property was inherited by his son the Reverend George Armstrong Bull, whose son, Harcourt, served as City Coroner during the 1857 Desjardin Canal railway disaster.

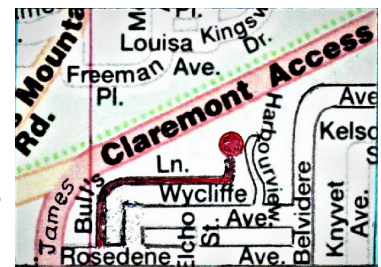
When the Reverend Bull was appointed Canon of Christ's Church Cathedral c.1878, he and his wife Eleanor (Farmer) built a cozy Confederation style home on the brow and called it "The Cliff". It was located at the end of a very long driveway, hence the name "Bull's Lane". It exited onto the Caledonia Road, now Upper James Street, opposite Southam Park, the former site of the Mountain View Hotel and Barton Incline Railway. Marked by roadside pillars, the driveway was redirected to Rosedene Avenue in



1972 after road widening of the Claremont Access. Constructed of local limestone "The Cliff" house had four first floor rooms with a large kitchen attached to the east side and a wooden summer extension including a well. The cellar cistern held 8,000 gallons of rainwater. The second floor had four large bedrooms. In 1886 Reverend Bull became Rector of All Saints Church in Niagara Falls making a move to that city necessary.

The south face of "The cliff" built in 1878 on Bull's Lane. Photo courtesy Harcourt E.G. Bull

The family retained ownership of "The Cliff" house until 1924 when Harcourt sold it to his nephew, Charles Eldon Bull, a stock broker who had been living in the United States with his wife, Hattie (of Greening Wire) and their two children, Harcourt E.G. and Sheila. They more than doubled the size of the structure with a grand extension to the east side including a third storey, creating a luxury home on the mountain brow. Charles, a wise investor, purchased neighboring property on Wycliffe and Harbourview Avenues enabling him and his wife Hattie to maintain the grandeur of Cliff house until their deaths in 1965 and 1975 respectively.



But grand estates require a lot of upkeep and are expensive to maintain. When their son, Harcourt E. G., a R.H.L.I. veteran returned from Europe in 1945 with his war bride, Patricia, they eventually built a new house on the adjoining Wycliffe property where they raised their (6th generation) children; Leslie, an educational assistant, Richard, a school principal and Eldon a human resources manager. Harcourt, age 95, died in an Ancaster retirement home and his daughter, Leslie was the last of the Bull family to reside in "The Cliff" house after her grandmother Hattie passed away. Since 1980 the estate with its once beautiful gardens and tennis court has become overgrown and hidden from view. Ladders and scaffolding suggest that the present owners are attempting to restore the building with some of its former glory.

Mountain Memories by award winning writer Robert Williamson appears monthly for the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society. See Hamiltonheritage.ca for more information