

## IF A FAMILY PORTRAIT COULD TALK

By Robert Williamson

When looking at a family portrait, I feel that the individuals are looking back at me. Their faces and body language tell me a story and with research I try to uncover their life experiences.

*Photo & story consultation by Jacqueline (Inch) Carson.*



A handsome portrait of the Inch family shows the oldest sons wearing military uniforms with campaign ribbons denoting active service. That the entire family is assembled suggests a post-war date of 1919, which is consistent with recorded birth dates. Rear row; Alex (1891), Robert (1893), George (1895), William (1899). Front row; Murray (1902), Father Adam (1858), Mother Jacqueline (1859) and Katharine (1897).

The oldest sons stand in descending order of age and rank with Alex and William maintaining family continuity with hands on their parent's chairs. **Alex wears pilot's insignia** having transferred to the new flying corps. William, a private, is about to enroll in law school and become a QC in Cobalt, Ontario. Murray, age 16, became a wire business apprentice. Twenty-one year old Katharine awaits news from her Tillsonburg fiancé returning to civilian life post-war, while Jacqueline, extends a caring hand to her patient daughter.

Adam Inch, a prominent dairy farmer in Barton Township on the central Mountain in what is today the Inch Park Neighborhood, sits confidently in his chair. In 1875, seventeen year old Adam Inch, with the sale of land bequeathed to him in Scotland upon his father's death, purchased 100 acres of cleared land along Fennell Avenue between Upper Wentworth and East 15<sup>th</sup> Street, extending one city block north of present Inverness Avenue. The farm was identified on the 1875 Historical Atlas of Wentworth County as Barton Concession 4, Lot 11 and contained a large barn, a substantial house and an orchard on what is today the corner of East 19<sup>th</sup> Street and Fennell Avenue. Only the house remains standing today, hidden behind a Greek "take-out" restaurant.

Adam, a man with ambition and an eye for the future was inspired by the growth of Mount Hamilton with its innovative Wentworth Street Incline, its Mountain Park with its popular Summers Theatre and an active Hillcrest Masonic Lodge. He wanted to play a role in community building and served several years on the Barton Township Board of Education and Township / County Council. In 1890, he married Carlue native Jacqueline Fortune who taught at the 'Mission School' on Concession Street. In 1905, he provided a parcel of land in the northeast corner of his farm facing onto Upper

Wentworth at Crockett Street for the township to build a two room brick school. Construction was completed in 1912 and it was identified as Barton School Section Number 3. It proved so successful that a second storey was added in 1917 and a large addition was built on the rear in 1922. When the city annexed the central Mountain in 1929 a new city school named George L. Armstrong, was built on Concession Street. The nearby S.S. Number 3 Barton on the former Inch property, became the George Armstrong Annex. In 1954 it was renamed Inverness School in keeping with its proximity to Inverness Avenue. After 75 years of service it was closed and dismantled in 1987.

Adam's wife, Jacqueline, also played an active community role organizing the Mount Hamilton Women's Institute in 1910 and became a member of the building committee that laid the cornerstone of Chalmers Presbyterian Church at the corner of Mountain Park and Cliff Avenues in 1921. It became the focal point of Mountain youth, social and religious activity.

In the 1920s Adam Inch saw more prospects for mountain development. He sold his livestock and petitioned to convert his farm land into city building lots providing water and sewer services. By 1929 the farm was reassessed from farmland to building lots and taxed accordingly. When the Depression hit in 1930 no lots were sold and Adam Inch had to forfeit forty-two acres to the city for unpaid taxes. After his death, sixteen of those acres were set aside in 1938 to become Inch Park and the grown family dispersed far and wide to Vancouver, Guelph, Northern Ontario and Tillsonburg,

As veterans of World War I, Robert and George became prominent Hamilton lawyers and community leaders. Robert Inch QC, rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and was appointed Honorary Colonel of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. As a Westdale resident he formed an associated A&SH cadet corps at the school. However, like his older brother, Alex, he took an interest in flight and wanted to encourage young people to fly. When he became chairman of the National Air Cadet movement he established the first air cadet squadron in Canada at Westdale Secondary School in 1941. Thus his efforts, through the Board of Education greatly influenced the lives of young Canadians and played a major part in Hamilton's recruiting and war bond drives during the Second World War.

George Inch QC, also achieved the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and remarkably saw service again with an artillery regiment in the Second World War. He served as a school trustee from 1932-1949 and was appointed Chairman of the Board in 1939. He also became the first chairman and founding member of the Hamilton Division of the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires in 1937. Today the Corps still provides retired veterans with employment in building security and by-law enforcement.

All in all, it is a family that has left its mark on the education, development and hard working image of Hamilton and its Mountain community.

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