

# The Port Ryerse Journal

## The RYERSE-RYERSON Family Association Newsletter

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### *What's NEW in the PAST Lane?*

### **Dobb's Ferry - The Truth Revealed** - By Thomas Ryerson

#### **Dobbs Ferry and the Ryerson-Ryerse family?**

You're wondering what the connection is aren't you? I

promise I'll tell! First, a little background.

Dobbs Ferry<sup>7</sup> is located in Westchester County and is a village in the town of Greenburgh situated on the east bank of the Hudson River about 8 miles southwest of White Plains and 20 miles north of New York City. It is a quaint village full of breathtaking views of the lower Hudson River. And it has a history that is connected with the Ryerson-Ryerse family.

About a year ago, I was researching the family of John Francis

Ryerson, the cousin of Joseph and Samuel, who was also a Loyalist. John Francis Ryerson came with his family from Brooklyn, NY to Nova Scotia in October of 1783, settling firstly at Clements, and then Annapolis. Francis Ryerson is the father of almost all the Ryerson's in Eastern Canada. At that time, his children were already grown. John F. was 39, Francis was 35, George M. was 32, and his daughter Ann was 27. They were all Loyalists and they stuck together, for awhile anyway. Only Francis and Ann actually stayed in Nova Scotia after the Revolution.

Francis' sister, Ann, was the wife of John Dobbs. John Dobbs was born in New York City in 1734 and Ann Ryerson was his second wife. They came to Nova

Scotia with 9 children, ranging in age from 22 years old to an infant. The four eldest children were from John's

prior marriage, his first wife having died. John Dobbs new life in Nova Scotia was short. It is thought he died about 1786, at the age of 52. His widow married twice after that. Of the five children John and Ann had, 3 grew to maturity, John, Henry, and Ann. Ann stayed in Annapolis, marrying George Hunt. John and Henry left Annapolis about 1795. Where did they go?

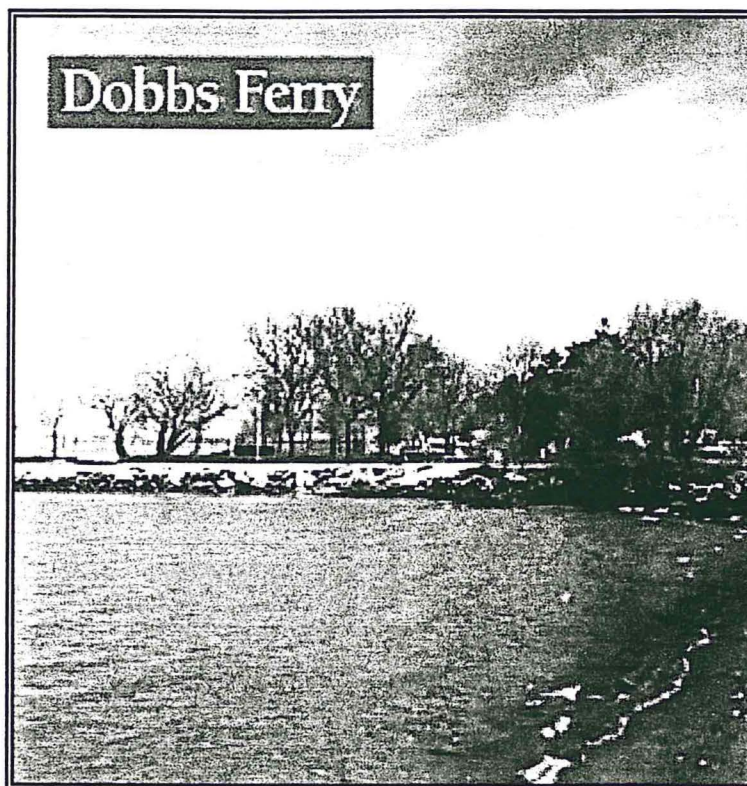
**That is our story.**

The Dobbs family has a history deeply rooted in New York State. Walter Dobbs, a mariner, settled in New Amsterdam about 1660. He married and had a family, residing on Barren

Island, Flatlands, NY. His son, John Dobbs, settled in the area that is now Dobbs Ferry about 1698. It was John Dobbs 3<sup>rd</sup>, the grandson of the above John Dobbs that married Ann Ryerson about 1773 and settled in Annapolis, Nova Scotia.

The 1916 Ryerson Genealogy by A.W. Ryerson (page 32) states that "John & Henry Dobbs, sons of John (3<sup>rd</sup>) & Ann (Ryerson) Dobbs, returned to New York and settled upon the Hudson River, founding what is now the present town of DOBBS FERRY. It is said they never married."<sup>4</sup>

I found that VERY interesting. Ryerson descendants founded a famous American town? Wow! Thus began



my journey, trying to separate fact from fiction, one John from another, and stories mis-told through the generations. My research comes from the internet with the assistance of several Dobbs descendants.

First, who were **John (4<sup>th</sup>) and Henry Dobbs** who left Annapolis, Nova Scotia, and went to found a town in New York State? Well, as stated they were the sons of John (3<sup>rd</sup>) Dobbs and Ann Ryerson. They were also half 1<sup>st</sup> cousins, twice removed, of Samuel Ryerse and Joseph Ryerson. John Dobbs (4<sup>th</sup>) was born about 1773, and Henry was born about 1776, probably both in New Jersey. They came to Nova Scotia in 1783 with their family, their father dying about 3 years later. They probably left Annapolis, Nova Scotia, sometime after 1795, once things settled down between the newly formed USA and British North America (Nova Scotia etc).

Since they may have written back to family in Nova Scotia from Dobb's Ferry, it may have been assumed they founded the town, or maybe they told a little "white lie" and said they founded it. For whatever reason, the family in Nova Scotia associated Dobb's Ferry with these two boys. Obviously, John (4<sup>th</sup>) and Henry knew their father definitely had a connection with the town, and their family was early settlers, but from my research, it was actually settled about 100 years *before* John (4<sup>th</sup>) and Henry arrived in Dobb's Ferry from Nova Scotia!

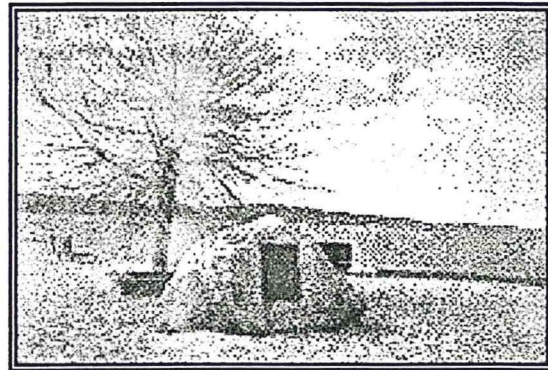
### What do the Dobbs Ferry historians say?

The legend is that the town was settled by Jeremiah Dobbs. (#2) Well, Jeremiah is the guy that got the credit, but most people today agree that it was actually Jeremiah's grandfather that settled the town. Another popular folklore is that Jeremiah's father, William Dobbs, founded the town in 1730. But again, most folks today know that this is not true. William certainly helped the town grow and prosper, but he did not found it. But before I get more into the story of Dobb's Ferry, I'd like to give a little background on the area where the town was founded.

Recent archaeological excavations near Wicker's Creek, NY, show the area that is now Dobbs Ferry was actually inhabited at least four thousand years before the first European contact. Little is known of these prehistoric people, but we do know about the area's

inhabitants shortly before the arrival of the first European settlers. (#4) These Native Americans were known as the Weckquasgeek Indians, a tribe belonging to the Mohegan Nation who spoke an Algonquin dialect and who lived in the Wicker's Creek area.

Henry Hudson's explorations in 1609 opened the area to Dutch colonization and by 1629 the Dutch West India Company was issuing grants requiring settlers to acquire the land from the Native Americans. The muskets of the colonists decided any disputes.



*Willow Point Park, Dobbs Ferry, NY*

Vreedrych Felypse, an immigrant carpenter from Holland who became a successful New Amsterdam trader, purchased the territory bounded by Spuyten Duyvil, the Hudson, the Croton and the Bronx Rivers. (#6) When the British conquered New Amsterdam, Felypse anglicized his name to Frederick Philipse and in 1693 received a Royal Charter confirming him as Lord of the Manor of Philipsborough.

Enter the Dobbs family. (#8) About 1698, John Dobbs of Barren Island, NY, settled on a leasehold of 282 acres on Frederick Philipse's Philipsborough Manor. As mentioned, John was the son of Walter & Mary (Marritt) Dobbs, and was born about 1675. As far as I can figure, the Dobbs family was of English descent. I'm pretty sure Walter Dobbs was born in England. Bristol has been mentioned, but no hard proof, yet.

There is a little known tradition that holds that "old Jan Dobbs" operated a primitive ferry between Willow Point and Sneden's Point beginning about 1698-1700. (#3) The area formerly known as Wysquaqua, or

Willow Point, through general acceptance, became Dobb's Ferry. Sneden's Point, across the Hudson from Dobbs Ferry, was settled by Jan and Nicholas Sneden family, who came to New Amsterdam in 1658 and settled at Sneden's Point about 1687.

The biggest culprit of misinformation is "Bolton's History," which was filled full of mistakes taken as gospel. It was he who claimed that Jeremiah Dobbs founded and ran the ferry. Another culprit is Scharf's "History of Westchester County," which claims the Dobbs were Swedes! (#1) I feel VERY confident in reporting that it was in fact John Dobbs Sr. that started it about 1698. (#7) John got the ferry running and was able to make a living. About 1705 he married Elizabeth Hyatt and they had two sons, William, born in 1706, and John Jr. born in 1708. Elizabeth Dobbs died after John Jr.'s birth. John Sr. married for his second wife a lady named Abigail. John and Abigail had 6 children, one of which was Molly, born in 1709. The family lived on the corner of Walnut and Broadway Streets in Dobbs Ferry.

In 1730, William, the 24 year old son of John Sr., took the ferry operation over from his father. (#5) It may be for this reason that some historians think the ferry started with William, not realizing that the father, John, actually ran it for the first 30 years. William's brother John Jr., seemed not to have an interest in the ferry business, and instead left the area to seek his fortune in New York City. This is where the Ryerson connection with Dobb's Ferry basically ends, as John Dobbs Jr. had left the area. In New York City, John Jr. married to Anna Newkirk, the widow of William Miller. They had three children, John 3<sup>rd</sup>, born in 1734, Anna in 1736, and Jane in 1738. John 3<sup>rd</sup> was the father of John Dobbs 4<sup>th</sup> and Henry Dobbs, who came from Annapolis, Nova Scotia to Dobbs Ferry about 1795. Although John 3<sup>rd</sup> was born in New York City, he lived in New Jersey and New York State before going to Nova Scotia.

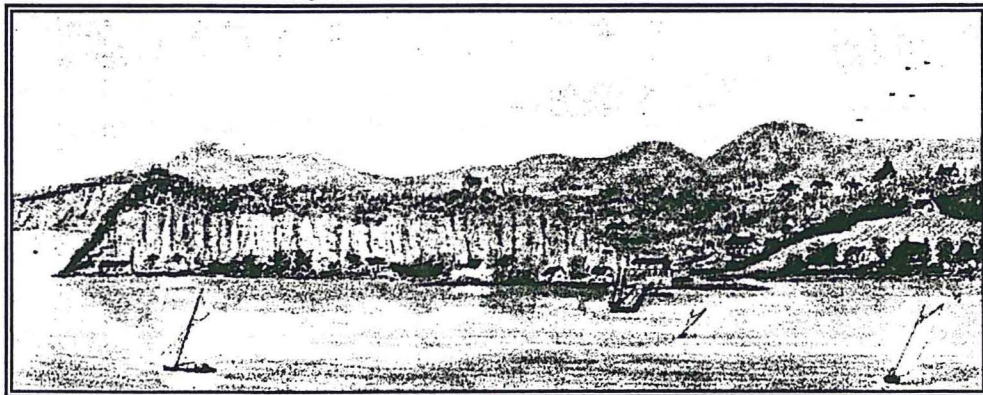
**But back to Dobb's Ferry!** 1740 was an important year in the ferry's history, for it was this year that Robert Sneden Jr., a

farmer and carpenter, married Molly Dobbs, daughter of John Dobbs Sr., and half sister to William Dobbs, current operator of the ferry. The ferry was busy and thriving. It was also 1740 when Robert Sneden Jr. became an official partner in the ferry operation.

In 1756, Robert Sneden died, and William Dobbs brought his son, Abraham, into the ferry business to replace Sneden. William also had a younger son, Jeremiah, and he is the one that everyone wants to credit with the operation of Dobbs Ferry, but so far, I have found no real proof of that. Somehow Jeremiah Dobbs grabbed the fame from his brother Abraham, father William, and grandfather John! Molly Dobbs Sneden operated a tavern at Sneden's Point after her husband died.

Then, in 1759, things changed. It is thought that John Dobbs Sr. may have died this year, as Molly Sneden took the ferry over from William and his son Abraham. They in turn, opened an Inn at the former home of John Dobbs Sr., which is one reason we think John Sr. may have died. This ended 61 years of the Dobbs name in connection with the ferry. Molly Sneden was a blood Dobbs, so it was still a part of the Dobbs family, just not the male side. The same year, Sneden's Point became known as Sneden's Landing.

During the Revolution, the area — a sparsely populated farming community — was contended for by both sides. (#9) The Sneden's, for the most part, were Tories. Even though the ferry carried Col. Aaron Burr (1779) and Martha Washington (1775), Molly Sneden was also known to have snuck the odd British Soldier in a wooden chest, hiding him from the Patriots!



On September 30, 1778, at Edgars Lane (just south of Dobbs Ferry) American militia ambushed and destroyed an eighty-man Hessian patrol. It is thought that William Dobbs, the 2<sup>nd</sup> operator of the ferry, died during the year 1778, and may have been buried at Trinity Church in New York City.

In 1781, the Dobbs Ferry shoreline and Sneden's Landing were fortified to prevent the British fleet from interdicting American and French supply lines. American fire from the Dobbs Ferry Redoubt sank the warship *HMS Savage* which had been attacking American supply sloops off Tarrytown.

Shortly after the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, the Sneden family came under suspicion for refusing to sign the General Association Articles declaring allegiance to the cause of liberty. Named in a resolution approved by the Committee for Safety at a meeting held in Clark's Town on July 29, 1776, the sons of Molly Sneden, Dennis, Jesse, William and Samuel all suffered the consequences of being named Tories. By 1783, after the Revolution was over, Molly and her sons lived in New York City, and stayed there for the next 5 years. Molly's third son, John "The Patriot" Sneden, took over the ferry from his banished mother, and restored honour (for the American's anyway) to the ferry name.

The Dobbs family was in the same boat, John Dobbs 3<sup>rd</sup> and his 1<sup>st</sup> cousin William Dobbs also refused to sign the General Association Articles. John 3<sup>rd</sup> had left New York City, had spent some time in New Jersey, and by 1775 was living in Haverstraw, NY, with his bride of a couple of years, Ann Ryerson. They were branded Tories, and may have returned to New York City for protection from the Patriots. They were in New York City by 1783.

John "The Patriot" Sneden ran the ferry from about 1783 to about 1820. (#5) His mother Molly returned to the area about 1788, and most likely the 79 year old lady of the ferry retired. She died in 1810. The operation of the ferry probably passed on to John "The Patriot" Dobb's son, John "Boss" Sneden, who probably ran the ferry until his death in 1829 at the age of 59. From here, the ferry operations were taken over

by Larry Sneden, son of John "Boss" Sneden, about 1830.

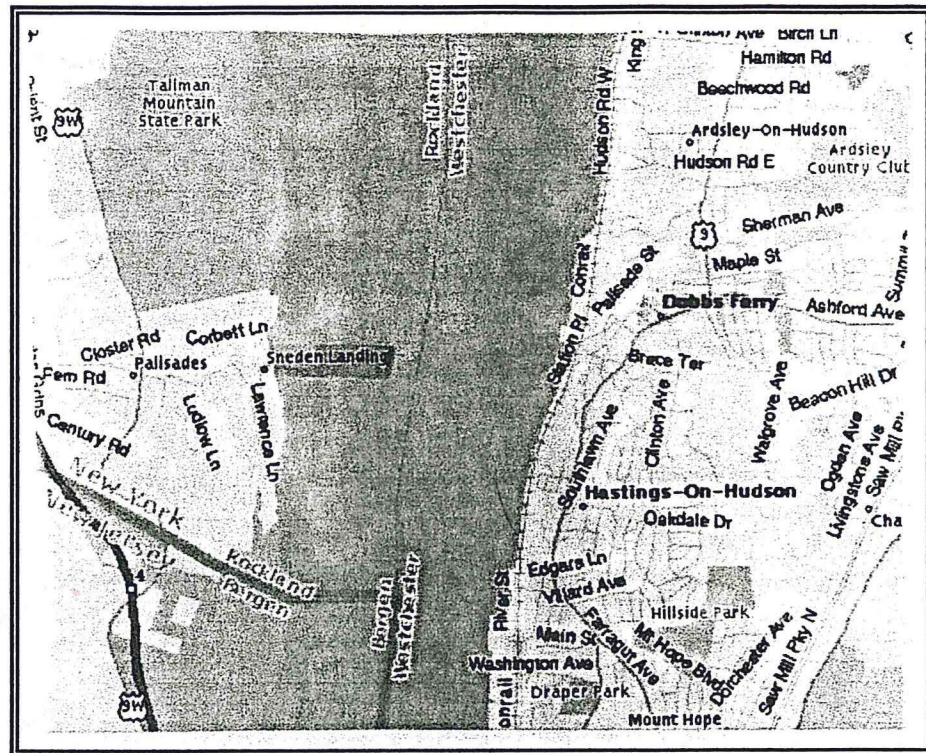
Larry Sneden operated the ferry until his death in 1869 when it was taken over by his son in law, William Coates. It had been in the Sneden family name for about 100 years. The daughter of William Coates, Ella Sneden Coates, wrote the manuscript, "The Story of the Ferry," of which three copies were produced in 1903.

William Coates ran the ferry until 1874, when Horton D. Sneden, the great great grandson of John "The Patriot" took it over. In 1880 Horton's brother John N. Sneden assisted until Horton's death in 1886. William Coates came to the rescue again, and kept the ferry in the Sneden family until 1903. From 1903 to 1944 the ferry was operated outside the family.

**REWIND to about 1795** when John (the 4<sup>th</sup>) and Henry Dobbs travel from Annapolis, Nova Scotia, to Dobbs Ferry, NY. At this time, the ferry was being operated by John "The Patroit" Sneden, who was a cousin to these Dobbs boys. Did John (the 4<sup>th</sup>) and Henry know that the ferry was started by their great grandfather almost 100 years before? Did they try to contact close Dobbs cousins? Did they look up their half great aunt, Molly Sneden, and get caught up with the gossip? Did they even know who she was? Or did they send a letter home, post-marked Dobbs Ferry, and state they founded the town? Hard to say. We lose our trace on these 2 boys at this point. We have no idea what happened to them. More in depth research would be interesting. Whatever the result, the information did make it's way to Albert W. Ryerson who printed in his book, "John (the 4<sup>th</sup>) and Henry Dobbs founded the present day Dobbs Ferry, NY!" The information could have very well come from the family of their sister, Ann Dobbs Hunt, who lived until 1866.

As an aside, it should be mentioned that the ferry was one of the earliest ferry routes on the Hudson, and as mentioned, ended its 246 year run in 1944. It was replaced by the construction of the Tappen Zee Bridge in 1955. The town of Dobbs Ferry is located about 20 miles north of New York City, and plaques state that it was named for it's founder, William Dobbs (1706-1778). The two square mile town was incorporated in 1873, and today is an affluent community with about 9,940 residents.

A present day map of the area, showing Sneden's Landing to the west and Dobb's Ferry to the East.



#### Dobbs Ferry Masters 1698-1903

- |                              |                      |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. John Dobbs                | 1698-1730            |
| 2. William Dobbs             | 1730-1759            |
| 3. Robert Sneden Jr.         | 1740-1756            |
| 4. Abraham Dobbs             | 1756-1759            |
| 5. Molly Sneden              | 1759-1783            |
| 6. John "The Patriot" Sneden | 1783-1820            |
| 7. John "Boss" Sneden        | 1822-1829            |
| 8. Larry Sneden              | 1829-1869            |
| 9. William Coates            | 1869-1874, 1886-1903 |
| 10. Horton D. Sneden         | 1875-1886            |
| 11. John N. Sneden           | 1880-1886            |

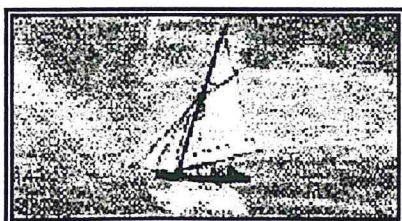
#### Research Web Sites:

(Numbers from the story correspond here)

- (1) [http://33.1911encyclopedia.org/D/DO/DOBBS\\_FERRY.htm](http://33.1911encyclopedia.org/D/DO/DOBBS_FERRY.htm)
- (2) <http://www.rootsweb.com/~nywestch/towns/dobbsfry.htm>
- (3) <http://www.ohwy.com/ny/d/dobbsfer.htm>
- (4) <http://www.design-site.net/dobbsferry/dfhist.htm>
- (5) [http://www.rockleigh.org/History/Families/Sneden\\_family.htm](http://www.rockleigh.org/History/Families/Sneden_family.htm)
- (6) <http://www.hopefarm.com/hudctpg1.htm>
- (7) [http://www.relocate-america.com/states/NY/cities/dobbs\\_ferry.htm](http://www.relocate-america.com/states/NY/cities/dobbs_ferry.htm)
- (8) <http://www.co.rockland.ny.us/Arts/may93.html>
- (9) <http://www.hudsonriver.com/ferry.htm>
- (10) <http://cgenerun.crosswinds.net/L/d1115.html>

Information on the Dobbs Family courtesy of Jeff K Dobbs, Charles E. Dobbs, and Donald P. Dobbs.

Ryerson info courtesy of Ryerse-Ryerson Family History by Albert Winslow Ryerson - 1916.



# 1927 Wedding Bells

Courtesy of the Chicago Daily News Negatives Collection-  
News of the marriage of Forsythe Sherfesse to  
Emily Borie Ryerson, widow of Arthur L. Ryerson  
who was lost on the Titanic.

December 9, 1927

## Fights Storms In Journey for Wedding Date

CHICAGO—(U.P.) — A journey halfway around the world, which included a storm at sea, a blizzard and a forced airplane trip to reach his destination on time, will culminate in the marriage here today of Forsythe Sherfesse and Mrs. Emily Borie Ryerson.

Sherfesse, financial adviser to the Chinese government at Peking, made the journey to Chicago to claim his bride. A storm at sea delayed his boat; a blizzard necessitated re-routing of his train; and the two combined forced the airplane trip from St. Paul to Chicago in order to arrive in time for the ceremony.

He arrived on time, only to find out Mrs. Ryerson had postponed the wedding until today.

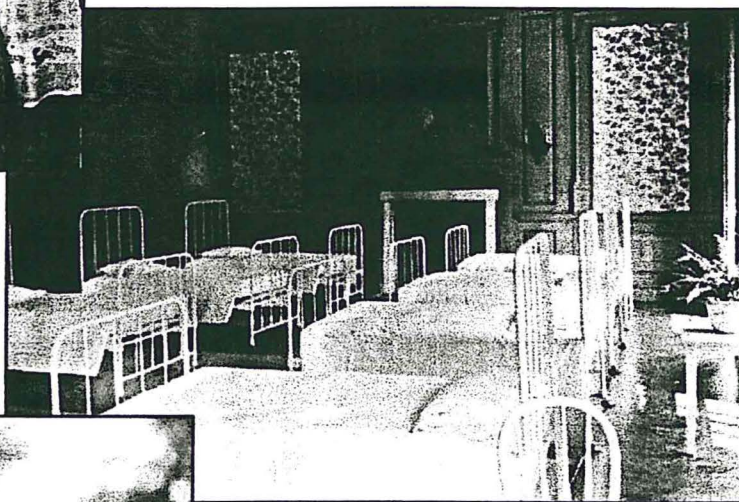
### DELAYS WEDDING

Chicago, Dec. 9. (AP).— Mrs. Emily Borie Ryerson, prominent Chicago society woman, called off for today her marriage to Forsythe Sherfesse, financial adviser for the Chinese government at Peking, because of his inability to reach Chicago in time for the wedding despite the fact that he rushed out of the west attempting to complete the 9,000 mile trip before noon today, the time fixed for the ceremony.





Emily (Ryerson) Sherfesse (at right in this picture standing in front of a Victory Liberty Loan poster) was very active in the war effort. Below, a room in her home at 2700 Lake View Av., Chicago, Ill. prepared for the use of needy children during the war.



Jack Ryerson who survived the sinking of the Titanic.

We are happy to RE-RUN this story first printed in the February 1999 issue of the Port Ryerse Journal. It may be new information for recent subscribers and significant enough for another look by the rest of us.

## A Name is a Name is a Name

or  
How our ancestors signed their names – and when!

Reijer Reijersz  
Written by church clerk  
Amsterdam, Holland  
Year – 1630



His Mark

No signature has been found for Marten, the son of Reijer Reijersz, however, we find his name written as

*Marten Reijersen*

in the records of the Flatbush Dutch Church - 1663. His name is also found on the Breukelen assessment rolls in 1675 as

*Maerten Ryerse*

and in 1683 as

*Marten Reisen*

The name of Joris, the son of Marten Reijersen can be found in the 1703 Census of New York and is written

*Jores Rijersie*

The 1707 Survey of the lands purchased in New Jersey records his name as

*George Reyersen*

He is recorded as George Ryerson throughout the text of his last Will and Testament written in 1749 by an unknown writer. The signature from that document is reproduced here and appears to be in his own hand.

The old handwriting is difficult to decipher but it appears that He wrote his name as

**Yores Reijerse.**

The Inventory of the Estate of Joris Ryerson's also provides us with the signatures of two of his sons, John and George Jr. It is interesting to note that they were still using the Dutch spelling of

**REIJERSE**

in 1749, over 100 years after their grandfather arrived from Amsterdam.

In June of 1752, a public auction was held to liquidate the estate of Joris Ryerson. We have the sale list, written by an unknown clerk. It is interesting to notice that he spelled the name as shown here, perhaps phonetically. The character that resembles an f was used as an s.

We have several examples of the signature of Joris's son, Luke. The one shown below, dated 1759, still contains the old wax seal. Many of these old documents can be seen in the Ryerson file of the Philhower Collection located in the Special Collections of the Alexander Library, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J.

And so the spelling of **REYERSE** continued for one more generation.

Luke Reyerse had five sons. From all the documents we have found pertaining to these boys, it appears that they all could write and now spelled the surname as

### RYERSON.

On June 8, 1776, Samuel Ryerson signed a receipt acknowledging receipt of 60 acres of land from the settlement of his father's last will and testament. Samuel was about 24 years old and was not yet caught up in the horrors of the American Revolution.



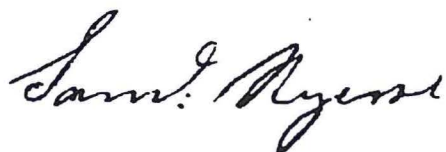
Samuel wrote a letter to his brother George Luke on September 24, 1779. He was then with the NJ troops that had gone south to fight in Georgia. The signature below is from that letter.



Taken a prisoner during the Battle of Kings Mountain, Samuel was made to sign a document acknowledging that he was a POW. It is dated October 13, 1780. It is the first evidence we have that he had now begun to spell his name **RYERSE**.



In a letter to his brother dated New York May 19, 1781, he writes, ".....hope to drive the Rebels out of the country or make them own George their Master," and signed it



Exiled to New Brunswick after the war, Samuel wrote many letters to Thomas Carleton, the Governor of the Province, asking for land fit for cultivation for the men of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of New Jersey Volunteers. Copies of these documents have been found and in every instance, Samuel signed his name **RYERSE**.

Samuel eventually settled in Canada where the area became known as Port Ryerse. We have numerous original documents all showing that he continued to write his name right up to the time of his death as follows, sometimes even with little flourishes!



Why did Samuel Ryerson begin to spell his surname as his father and grandfather before him.....while his brothers and cousins and all of their descendants continued using Ryerson? One thought is that when his commission as Colonel of the Norfolk Co. (Ontario) Militia arrived, it contained a spelling error and he adopted that spelling rather than to deal with the complications of having it corrected. This idea, however, disagrees with the evidence.

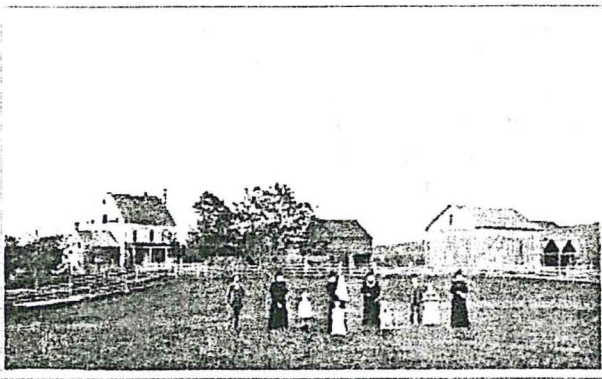
Another possibility is that the bitterness of losing the war was so painful that he did it as a defiant gesture to distinguish himself from those members of the family who fought against him and won the war!

We may never know the full reason. We do know, however, that Samuel's younger brother Joseph retained the spelling of Ryerson - which makes the job of tracing the descendants of both of these brothers in Canada much easier.



Most of the descendants of the American branch of the family have also continued using Ryerson. The Ryerse branch is much smaller but very proud - feeling that their name more closely resembles the original old Dutch name.

No matter how you spell it, we're all cousins and proud of it!



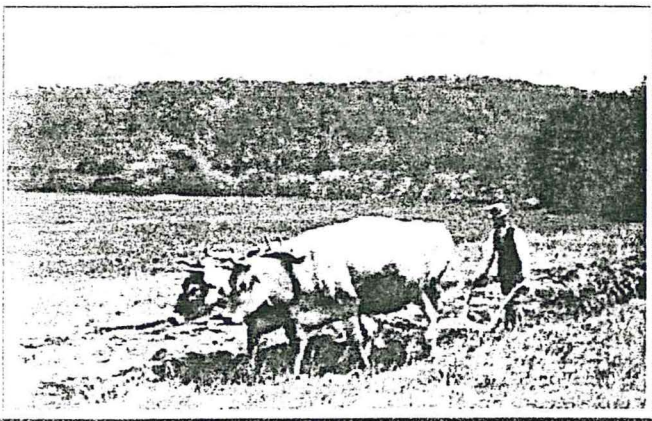
Built by Tunis Ryerson about 1780 on Hook Road, we see the Ryerson farm. The ladies are John A. Ryerson's daughters. With them are grandchildren. Also pictured are: Edward R. Brown, first from the left, and Frank R. Parry, third from the right.

This picture was taken in 1889. The farm and the lands pictured are now under the Wanaque Reservoir.

## Family History on the Internet – Wanaque Area Local History Archive

<http://www.palsplus.org/wannaque/archive/settlers.htm>

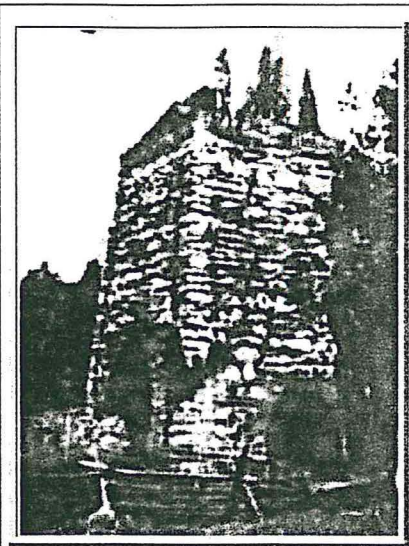
During the first quarter of the 18th Century, a few European settlers found their way into the picturesque Wanaque Valley. Names familiar to us, the Beams, RYERSONS, Sloats, Van Duynes, Van Wagoners, Vreelands, and many others, represent families that settled these hills in the early 1700's.



The activities of these early Dutch settlers centered on providing the bare necessities of life. Farming was the principal occupation. The men raised sheep; the women spun and wove the wool into cloth. As time passed, the wool was taken to Pompton Lakes after shearing and made into blankets and yarn. The settlers cut timber from the surrounding forest and hauled it to a saw mill to be made into lumber for their homes.

The above photograph was taken around the turn of the Twentieth Century by area photographer Vernon Royle. It is called, simply, "Plowing with Oxen."

Built in 1838 by Martin J. Ryerson on Furnace Lane, this furnace was used to separate iron ore from rock. The ore came from both the Wanaque and Ringwood mines. One was called the Blue Mine in the section known as Westbrook Valley. Also called London Mine and Iron Hill Mine, it was opened around 1800 and was named for the bluish cast of the ore. The area on which the furnace stood is now under the Wanaque Reservoir. The Furnace had its last blast in 1855 and was demolished in the 1920's, its materials being used as riprap for the construction of the Raymond Dam.



## ....and from ANCESTRY.COM New York Family Bible Records 1581-1917

**Name:** George Ryerson

**Intro:**

Holy Bible in Dutch; Dordrecht, Pieter Keur, 1719.

This Bible originally belonged to George Ryerson and has his name in it, dated 1781. It contains various entries of the Ryerson family and their slaves, and on another page is a series of entries referring to the Van Der Voort family. Whether they first owned the Bible and it afterwards went to the Ryersons, or whether the Van Der Voort record was copied in, we have not been able to determine. The Bible now belongs to the American Bible Society and has been deposited in the New York Public Library.

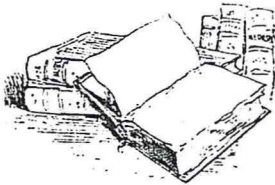
**Name:** George Ryerson

**Comment:** his Bible Book. God give him grace therin to look; Not only look but understand, For learning is better than house and land. When house and land is gone and spent Then learning is most excellent. October the 18, 1781.

**Comment:** My negro boy born the 10 February, 1783.

*Genealogical Records; Manuscript Entries of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Taken from Family Bibles 1581 - 1917*

## A Chat with Phyllis



We are pleased to share the Dobbs Ferry story with you and hope to hear more from Tom in future issues. The internet provided some interesting items for this issue as well. It's amazing what turns up when you do a search for RYERSE or RYERSON!

Can you believe it??? We are entering the eleventh year of publishing The Port Ryerse Journal. We've recently heard of another newsletter that sadly has gone out of business – stating that

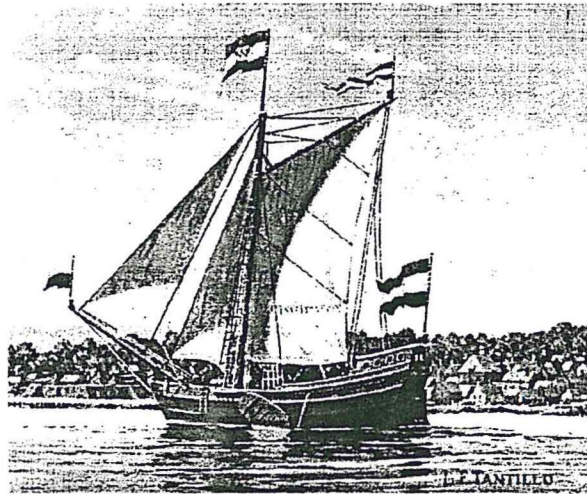
*"...there simply is not enough interest to justify the tremendous amount of time, effort and expense needed to produce and distribute a publication of this quality and content."*

Granted, we are a 'kitchen table' operation but we have tried very hard to be as professional – and interesting as possible. It has been a pleasure and an honor to tell the stories of this remarkable family.

At the moment we are well over the 100 mark for subscriptions as well as providing copies to a dozen or more major libraries and historical associations across the US and Canada.

Tom and I want to say a genuine **THANK YOU** to all our readers. You're terrific!

*Phyllis Ryerse*



Rutger Jacobsen's yacht *de Eendracht* sailing past Beverwijck, ca.1655. Painting by L. F. Tantilto.

*The good ship that once carried our ancestors*

## Our Readers Write!

Orin and Barbara Ryerse have told us a little more about the Ryerse Street sign in Port Dover. RYERSE CRESCENT was named for the Ryerse subdivision. Percy Ryerse was a builder and land developer in Port Dover and built the sub-division on the edge of the Black Creek and Mill Street, which is the dividing line between the village of Port Dover and the original Ryerse Black Creek land grant. Percy and his wife Mary were the originators of the Family Picnic as well, which began in 1954. The picnic was held behind their home in the woods right by the subdivision. The first games were held on the mound field beside their home.

*"Michael Crutchley's information regarding his family, and in particular that of Eliza Harris, was so well written. What a great gift that man has. — John Galbraith"*

**Editors Note:** We've give Michael a brief vacation but expect to get another of his "Letters from Over the Pond" in time for the next issue! We are fascinated by the lives of the daughters of Amelia (Ryerse) Harris and look forward to hearing more! Stay tuned!

## YALE UNIVERSITY

The University has announced this year's recipient of the ARTHUR LARNED RYERSON MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP. She is **Amanda Morin** of Fort Worth, Texas. Though undecided about her major, she plans to attend medical school and practice sports medicine.

### The Port Ryerse Journal

Published 3 times a year by the  
**RYERSE-RYERSON Family Association**  
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USA

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Submissions Welcome & Encouraged!

~~Ryerse@BellSouth.net~~

Ryerse\_Ryerson\_Family@yahoo.com

# The Port Ryerse Journal

The RYERSE-RYERSON Family Association Newsletter

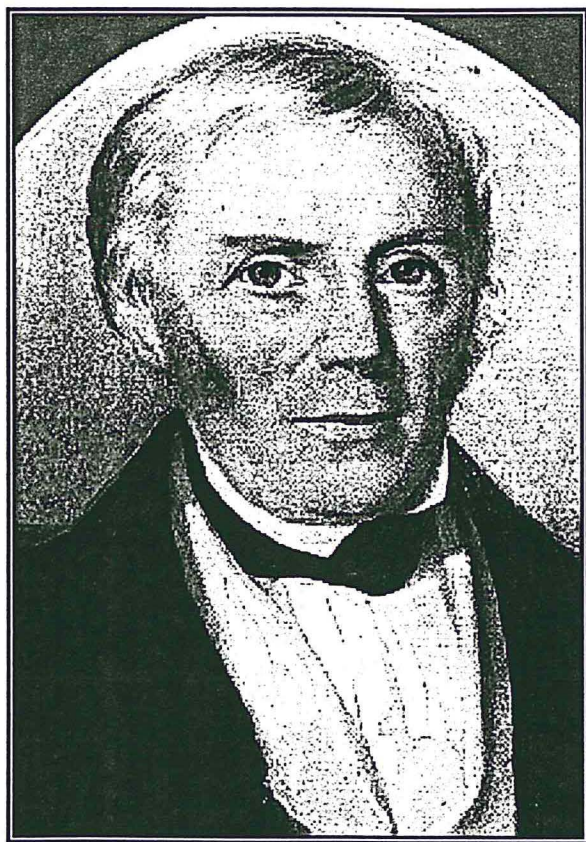
Volume 11 Issue 2

ISSN 201-0065

June 2004

## The English 'HARRIS'tocracy

by Michael E. Crutchley Esq.



John HARRIS

This month my 'letter from over the pond' is a postcard from the Caribbean. Spring is around the corner, and we have exchanged the late winter chills in England for the warm and gentle breezes of the Grenadine islands.

Our annual destination is a pretty little villa overlooking Admiralty Bay. Just two hundred years ago this bay was a bustling naval port. British interests in maritime trade were protected by a mighty garrison at the harbour mouth. Nowadays it is an anchorage for

leisure cruisers disgorging their cargo of tourists. A micro-tour of the island takes them to the crumbling Old Sugar Mill, once the island's hub of industry.

My own interest in this scene involves my forebear **John Harris**, the illegitimate boy from Devon who ran away to sea. For during his travels he stopped here, in transit from South America in the spring of 1813 on his way to serve in North America, unaware that he was going to meet a young girl named **Amelia** on the north shore of Lake Erie in the Upper Canadian village of PORT RYERSE.



Our paths cross nearly two centuries apart, and the two lines of the cross are written in different ink. His is the indigo of antiquity, a life of naval discipline and heavy formal attire, of long hours, poor rations and primitive medical assistance. Mine is the comfortable turquoise of my informal printed cotton t-shirt. **Work Less - Sail More'** it announces my life's motto. 190-odd years after the weary Harris takes his tender ashore for provisions, one of many stops on a prolonged and arduous 4000 mile journey, I cross his path in a fast scuba dive boat, heading for a coral reef at the western point of the island. I too have traveled 4000 miles. But that was yesterday. Wind in the hair and the sun on my back I wonder if John Harris and I were to meet, whether we would understand each other's way of life. Would our modern-day environment fill him with awe and envy? Or would he just be horrified.

Harris had considered settling in South America. Had he done so, history would have been re-written, and this story would not. But he was persuaded otherwise and set off in March that year for North America. On leaving the Grenadines he would have passed the little island of Dominica. At 92, one of his oldest living descendants, Daphne Agar lives there. Her colonial sugar plantation house overlooks the sea to the west. Daphne was born a century too late to have seen her great-great grandfather sailing quietly by, his future unfolding before him. Harris's own daughter Charlotte would later write so poignantly "How little we know what is in store for us." And at that moment he had absolutely no idea.

## **AMELIA RYERSE (1798-1882)**

### **A woman of substance**

**"Money excludes a great deal of unhappiness."**  
*The Diary of Amelia (Ryerse) Harris. 18<sup>th</sup> March 1859)*

*Without supporting documentation such as letters and diaries it would be almost impossible to characterize historically a family subject. With Amelia we have a wealth of information both in the form of her diary, transcribed by her great grandson, the late Robin Harris (to whose work I am eternally grateful), and in the volumes of letters found in the Harris Papers.*

## **Her Father's influence - COL. SAM**

Amelia was without doubt a strong character. She had to be. The life of the early Canadian settler was a hard one. Her father Samuel Ryerse had been no stranger to the privations of pioneer existence. Obdurate and indefatigable from the early years as captain in the New Jersey volunteers, Samuel had earned his commission by enlisting some 42 men required to fight for King George. His successful four year campaign until the pivotal battle at Kings Mountain when he was wounded in the hand and taken prisoner is well documented. Having lost two of his children and then his first wife in 1782 he was to marry secondly the widow Sarah Underhill. Life in their new home in New Brunswick was hard, and the land unsuitable, and by 1791 Samuel and his young family were encouraged to return to a hostile New York, only to lose all four surviving children to disease. So the decision to return to Upper Canada in 1794 was easier than the journey itself, and upon settling at Clarence (later named Port Ryerse after Samuel's death) the task of felling trees and building a small log house at Young's creek, not to mention the two mills, and clearing land for crops, while securing their animals from predation, would begin.

Sarah, his wife agreed to give the life a try, but by all accounts she also found the existence hard. By 1810, Samuel was in poor health. His daughter Amelia observed, 'A life of hardship and great exertion was telling upon a naturally strong constitution.' And so in June of 1812 Colonel Samuel Ryerse, businessman, miller, soldier, justice of the peace, road commissioner, school trustee, part time minister, pioneer settler and amateur dentist, succumbed to consumption and passed away.

Having been witness to his life Amelia was rightly aware of what to avoid; hardship. Prior to meeting her future husband, she had had been present at the American destruction of the family mills her father had worked so hard to build. "It would not be easy to describe my Mother's feelings as she looked upon the desolation around her." It was time to move up.

## John Harris and Amelia Ryerse

The account of Amelia's first meeting with the 33 year old Captain John Harris in April 1877 is rather enigmatic, and we may have to speculate as to its meaning, but here is the scene...

Harris pilots a large canoe to the dock at Port Ryerse with a compliment of crew. He is in full naval uniform, tall, fair-haired and fit. The population of Port Ryerse is at best some 24 souls, and the few visitors that do arrive are itinerant, impoverished settlers, banished empire loyalists, carving out a meager existence. Standing on the shore, watching the dashing Harris's arrival is the young 17 year old Amelia, who turns to her friend and says,

**'There is the man I shall marry.'**

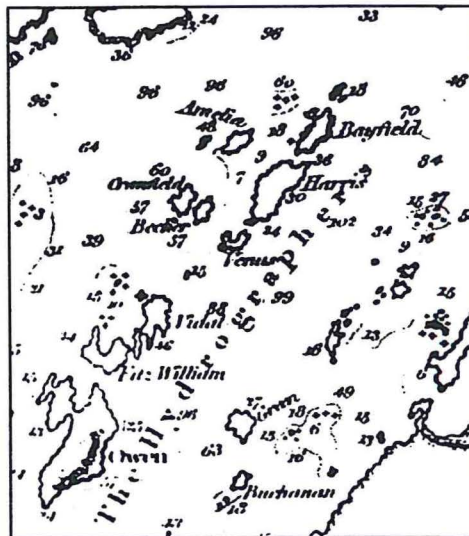
Canadians have a reputation for getting their man, and this was no exception. The courtship was commonly brief and less than six weeks later, on 27<sup>th</sup> June 1815, John and Amelia were married.

Harris, who retired from naval service as Master on half pay in 1817 would later find that he had married well, having the support of the Ryerson and the Ryerse families, several of whom occupied important positions in London district where the Harris family was to set up home in 1834 after seventeen years life of farming at Port Ryerse.

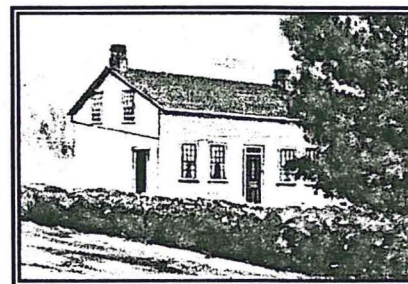
## From Port Ryerse to London, Ontario

The early days in their marriage were filled with Harris's work as Naval Hydrographer, surveying Lake Ontario through the St. Lawrence River as far as Montreal under Captain William Owen. Amelia stayed at their temporary home at the Hydrographer's House in Kingston.

During their survey they named a group of St. Lawrence islands 'The Hydrographers,' after themselves. Individual islands they named such as Owen, Bayfield, Becher, Harris and Vidal also included the 'deputy assistant mariner surveyor' Amelia.



In 1817 they moved to Port Ryerse where a house was built for Amelia. By 1822 they had had three children, William, Amelia and Sarah. Little Amelia died



of the croup in October 1821 and further tragedy was to strike the Harris family in June 1822 when the 5 year-old William fell from a moving cart. His grieving mother Amelia would refer to the event throughout her life in many diary entries...

June 1858 '... I thought of my first born and the morning he was placed on bed by the sofa, a bleeding corpse.'

August 1858 '... the 41<sup>st</sup> anniversary of poor William's birthday. How painful was his death...'

August 1881, her final year 'My first born, had he lived, would have been 64 years of age today.'

Amelia was very ill after the event. Harris wrote to her in October that year while away surveying Lake Lewis 'My dear Ame, ...I have been quite well. I am in hope you are getting on well also. I have... been very uneasy about you...' Harris remained marine surveyor and engineer for much of his working life until his municipal duties as Treasurer of London took hold in the 1840's.

Life improved at a fast pace after the family's move to London in 1834 and the building of Eldon Terrace (later Eldon House) overlooking the River Thames.



La Chaine Oct 4 1822  
[Machine]

My dear Son

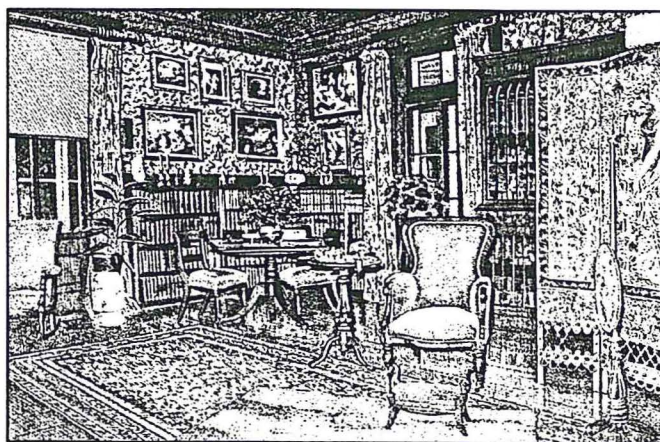
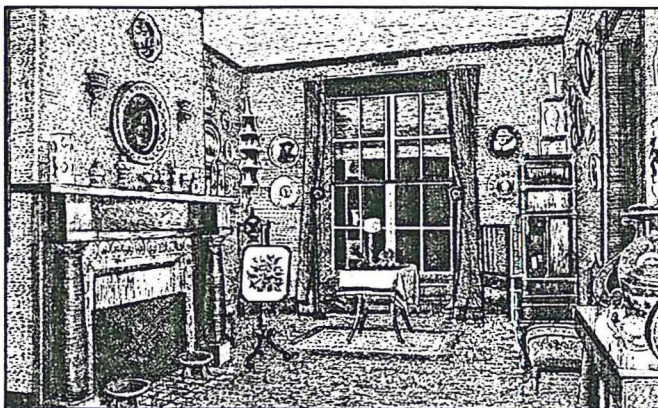
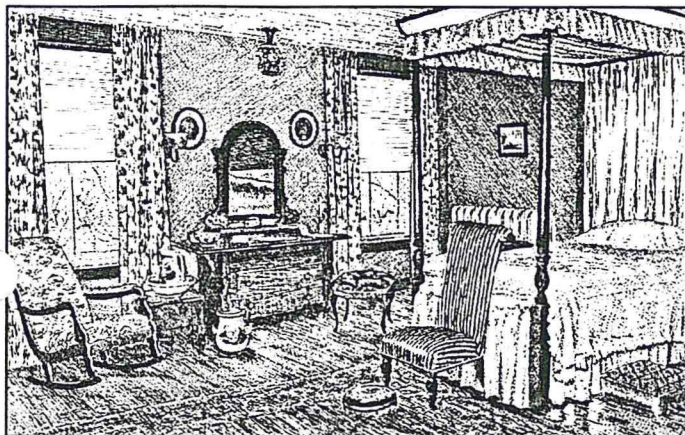
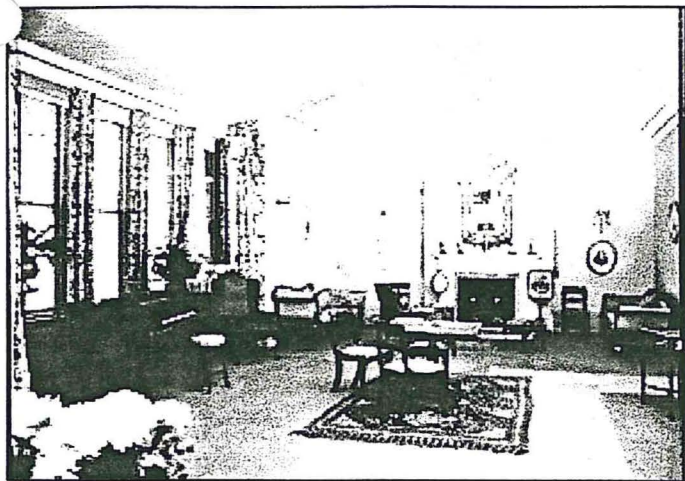
I am in the hope to be up in about  
a fortnight at home. I have been quite  
well & am in hope you are getting  
on well also. I have you may be  
supper been very uneasy about you  
& lodge with Gifford & dine with Mr. Brown  
on Sunday. I have been much interested in  
work of the Disciples, people in Montreal  
but I can not tell the same early on again  
with the same confidence - I shall I think  
as to the power of the Spirit here they  
are weaker at present. They often  
will be up this fall - God bless you  
I remain your  
Affectionately  
John Harris

## ELDON HOUSE

Built in 1834 by Capt. John Harris, R.N., treasurer of the London District, this is London's oldest remaining house. With his wife Amelia, daughter of Samuel Ryerse, Harris came to London after the District offices were moved here from Vittoria. For many years Eldon House was a centre of London's cultural and social life, and four generations of the Harris family dwelt in it during more than 125 years. In 1960 the family gave the house with most of its furnishings and eleven acres of land, to the City of London for a museum and park.

Entered by the Archaeological and Historic Sites Board, Archives of Ontario

By then there were seven surviving children, and three more would be born at Eldon House, seven girls and three boys, making a very large family for what was then a six room 'mansion.' Three years after their arrival the British Army Garrison was established nearby at what is now Victoria Park, and by 1845 the Harris's had a houseful of pretty young unmarried daughters: Sarah (24), Amelia (22), the twins Mary and Eliza (20), Charlotte (Chasse) (17), with Helen and Teresa still minors. Eldon House had now become a serious local attraction, and not for its architectural merit. It was now Amelia's task to arrange suitable matches for her 'chicks.'



*Postcard views compliments of Eldon House*

## VICTORIAN BETROTHAL

In these modern times the phrase 'marriage settlement' has largely disappeared from use. The patriarchal society of the Victorian age where women were still regarded as mere chattels, dictated that it was of financial importance for the parents of the bride to become involved in matrimonial negotiations. Thus a potential groom would be vetted for suitability, and it gave great credit to a suitor's advances if his family had worth. As important as good character, to some it even carried more importance than good looks.

By default Amelia was not short of potential suitors in the British garrison. Four of her daughters married British officers and two other introductions were to friends of the same.

Sarah was first to marry in 1846, Lt Col Robert Dalzell, 4<sup>th</sup> son of the Earl of Carnwath. Sarah went to live in England and died at Watnall Hall, Nottinghamshire in 1916.



Sarah (Harris) Dalzell



Robert Dalzell

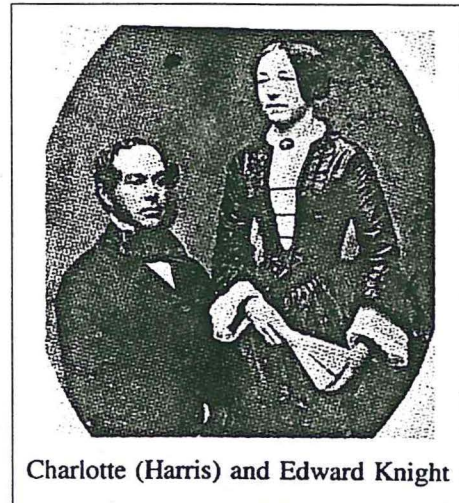


Mary (Harris) Peard



Shuldham Peard

In 1850 Mary married Lt George Peard who had an inheritance and also went to England where they lived at Easthampstead in Berkshire, and where she was buried in 1898.



Charlotte (Harris) and Edward Knight

The next summer it was Charlotte's turn to take the hand of Capt Edward Knight who also had private means. They were aiming to settle in Canada or England after Knight's posting in Rome, but Charlotte was drowned in the wreck of the *Ercolano* in 1854. The Mediterranean is her resting place. (see *The Port Ryerse Journal* – October 2001 and March 2002)

In quick succession Eliza married next Lt Col Charles Crutchley in October 1851. She too went to England and was buried at Sunninghill in 1910. (see *The Port Ryerse Journal* November 2003)



General Crutchley



Eliza (Harris) Crutchley

Later, Helen married Lord Portman's son, The Hon. Maurice Portman, who was to serve in the Canadian Parliament. Their children were taken to England after Helen's death in childbirth at Eldon House in 1860.



Helen (Harris) Portman



Maurice Portman

Gilbert Griffin, London Postal Inspector, married Amelia Andrina Harris on 27 June 1855 at Eldon House. They lived nearby before moving to Kingston, Ontario in 1880. Amelia Griffin died 20 January 1918 at Kirkfield, Ontario.



Gilbert Griffin



Amelia (Harris) Griffin

The last daughter to marry an Englishman was Teresa, to William Scott. She eventually settled in England after a life of travel and died in 1928 at Wick House in Berkshire. (pictures on next page)

## THE MARRIAGE DEAL

All those gentlemen had one thing in common apart from being of English birth. They all had wealth, and in some cases lots of it. My research has led me to conclude that Amelia had a part to play in their selection. Indeed the negotiations between the Harris's and Maurice Portman's parents, Lord and Lady Portman, head of a fabulously rich family, reveal all. In a letter to Helen's brother John in 1856, Lord Portman writes "...you will kindly notify me what are your wishes as to any Marriage Settlement being made... Maurice has about £4,000 of his own... and I am able to place £6,000 minimum at his disposal on his marriage... I hope, if I live, to be able to add to Maurice's fortune."

Conversely, when Charlotte (Chasse) had been approached by Lt Frank Campbell five years earlier, it was quickly established that he was penniless. Despite the fact that Chasse was besotted with 'darling Frank,' she was forbidden to speak or write to him, and he was unceremoniously packed off to New Zealand and never heard from again.

Amelia wrote often about money, and it seems to have occupied her mind, especially since her husband John had died in 1850 while she was still quite young, leaving her to manage a dwindling family resource, with the pressing problem of constant debt. As an example, shortly before her death in 1882 she wrote of the impending marriage of one of her grandchildren. "Sarah tells me that Maude is to be married to Launcelot (Rolleston). She is much pleased with the match. He has three or four thousand pounds a year. Maude refused a much better match in point of money, a gentleman worth 30,000 pounds a year."

Of all the English bridal matches, the sixth and last would be quite a comedy if it were not so pathetic, with Amelia and her sons, who were now quite grown up, vacillating over the proposal from William Scott, who was to marry Teresa the youngest daughter in 1859.

## William Scott and Teresa Harris



William John Scott



Teresa (Harris) Scott

The first reference Amelia made to Scott was in November 1858 when he had tea at Eldon House and subsequently lunched and dined there some five times over the next three weeks before leaving for Cuba with his friend Maurice Portman, who had introduced him.

Amelia wrote, in her accustomed vinegar tone, "We are all sorry to see Mr. Portman go but are very glad Mr. Scott is with him."

Scott returned in February (1859) and bestowed gifts on all the family on Valentine's Day. At the top of Amelia's list was "...a carved ivory case for Teresa. It is very kind of him..."

Scott hung around for a couple of weeks and then out of the blue "John received a letter this morning from Mr. Scott which surprised us very much. It is a formal proposal for Teresa... (I think) it would be better for all parties that we should know more of each other."

Mr. Portman wrote to Teresa (warning) that if Mr. Scott proposed for her, not to take him. "What his reasons are we do not know. As far as we can judge, Mr. Scott is an excellent match. He has upwards of £2,000 a year... he is certainly the reverse of handsome but I do not consider beauty an essential in a matrimonial connection."

On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, Scott called again, but the 19 year old Teresa would not meet with him. Amelia went on to write with some displeasure

"When we were going to bed she (Teresa) told me she would not marry Mr. Scott, that she did not like him well enough."

That Sunday at church, Scott sat at their pew. "Teresa flutters like a young bird when she sees Mr. Scott... he does not know that she is aware of his matrimonial wishes."

On Tuesday Scott came to dine at Eldon House but was in a foul mood all evening. Amelia mused, "I wonder if he is bad tempered and if that is the reason Mr. Portman told Teresa not to marry him... I should feel more content and more that my work was finished if I could see her, what I believe to be, well married."

Scott excused his behaviour two days later saying he was not well. But Amelia also noted that Scott had been informed of the death of an old aunt who has left him £4,000 and a remote chance of £50,000 more.

A week later, Portman handed Amelia a private letter stating that Scott was a drunkard. While on the Mississippi, Scott got so drunk that he fell out of his berth! Portman went on to say that he 'tells dirty stories which shows a depraved mind and that he *romances* to as great extent.' Amelia contemplated this

Carefully, and in an unusual move for a woman of temperance convinced herself that it was of little significance, and the sons Edward, John and George supported her view. However Teresa was pleased that she had now found an excuse to turn Scott down. So on March 18<sup>th</sup> Amelia wrote "We scarcely know how to give Mr. Scott his dismissal... he has done everything that is right towards us, and... he has reason to think that his suit was favourably received, but as Teresa has decided she cannot marry him an explanation must take place."

Even so, the family was still dithering a week later when Scott handed letters depicting his unhappiness at the uncertainty. But Amelia also noted that "The property which Mr. Scott... will become heir to has been registered at £60,000.

Amelia then decided to find out more about the man and that he should wait some two months and renew his proposal if he so wished. She finally resolved to write to Mary's husband Shuldhham (Peard) in England to make enquiries into Scott.

Over the next month Scott visited Eldon House regularly and bestowed frequent gifts, especially to Teresa ... "...a 'not very good' diamond ring."

On May 8<sup>th</sup> Amelia received a letter from Shuldhham in England confirming what Scott had already told the Harris's... that Scott had 'worth.' "... all objections on my part will be withdrawn and now Teresa must decide for herself."

Nevertheless, Teresa it would appear had still made no mention to Scott a fortnight later. Amelia noted "Things went wrong with Mr. Scott and Teresa today. When Mr. Scott came to dinner he had evidently taken a very little too much wine. But sure enough Mr. Scott urged Teresa to give him an answer and said if she would wear in the evening a ring which he had given her he would take it as an acceptance or her not doing so a refusal."

Teresa came to dinner without the ring on her finger. The inflamed Scott said good night without any further remark, and stormed out. By now he had been waiting three months for the family to give him a decent response to his proposal. He was very much out of humour in the morning and complained that he had

been "detained here shilly shallying at a loss of £100 a month."

With the decision very much in Teresa's hands, Amelia turned observer in the match, while putting gentle pressure on Teresa. "Mr. Scott is in love with Teresa. (I wish she was in love with him)."

About this time, Amelia's son John Harris and Elizabeth Loring became engaged and so there were two or more courtships going on at Eldon at that time. Perhaps it was John's engagement that encouraged Teresa to join in the fun and declare for Scott.

On May 25<sup>th</sup> Amelia wrote' ... "She has decided in Mr. Scott's favour. I hope she will be happy..."

The engagement was very fragile, filled with uncertainty. But the wedding went ahead. On 18<sup>th</sup> August 1859. Teresa and Mr. Scott pronounced their vows very feebly.

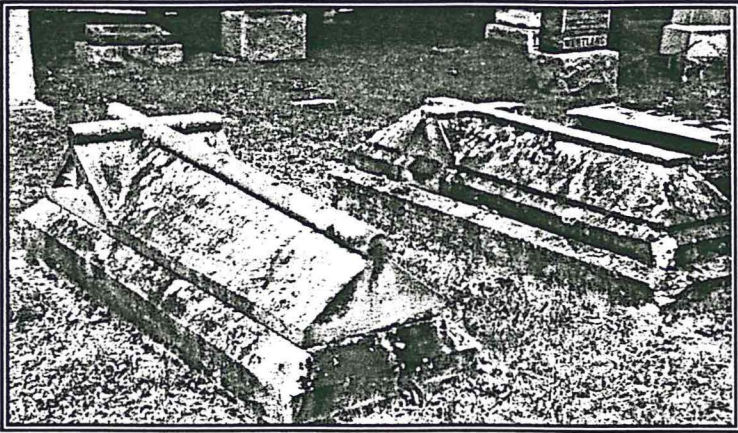
The marriage was not a happy one. Teresa spent her married life traveling the world, dragging the unwilling Scott with her. By the time William Scott died of typhoid en route from India to the Middle East in 1875, Teresa was in love with a young Englishman St George Littledale, whom she immediately married. There were no children.

## Amelia's six 'English' daughters

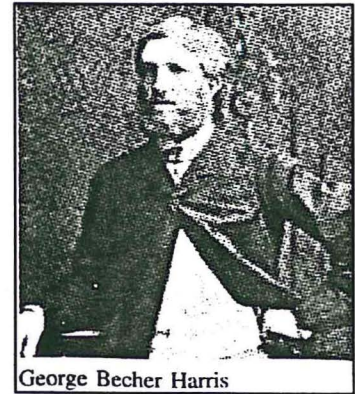
Of Amelia's six 'English' daughters, three mothered successful dynasties, and we have so far traced 130 descendants of Sarah, Eliza and Helen Harris here in England and throughout the world. Some have even found their way to Canada.



The frail Amelia (Ryerse) Harris left Eldon House in the final few weeks of her life to stay with her son George and his wife Lucy (Ronalds) Harris at Raleigh House nearby in London. She died there on 30 March 1882 at 84 years of age. She was returned to Eldon House for her burial at Woodlands Cemetery beside her husband.



Edward Harris



George Becher Harris



John Fitzjohn Harris

## Egerton Ryerson

Sitting in the morning shade of a palm tree I am enjoying a banana cake and a rich cup of coffee; a celebration for completing this piece. Out of the corner of my eye I catch the word 'Ryerson.' It's printed on that man's t-shirt. I introduce myself and we immediately strike up a friendship. He is Professor David Harvey retired lecturer at the Ryerson Institute (I think that's what he said) in Toronto. Our conversation is brief, as I have to catch a plane, but next year we shall continue where we left off. Meanwhile I'm becoming convinced that the Ry-Ry phenomenon is a truly international one.

*Michael Crutchley*

Amelia's three sons

## A Chat with Phyllis



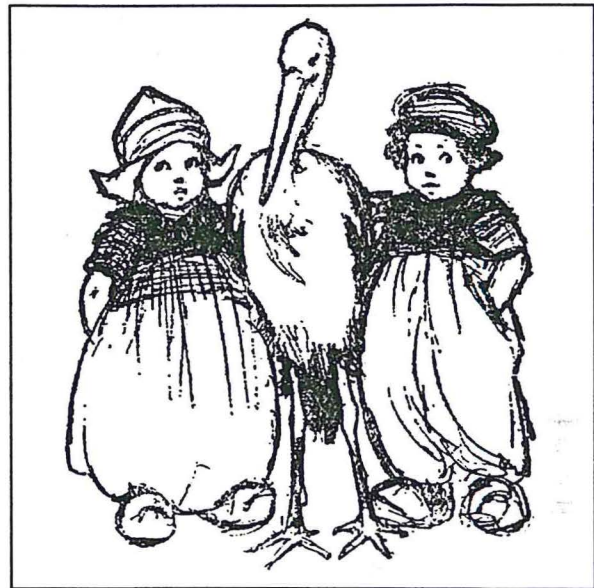
It's Ryerse-Ryerson REUNION time. I can almost feel those gentle warm breezes coming across Lake Erie! Can you join us in Port Ryerse this year? We're happy to offer the family T-shirt with that dramatic logo designed by Maureen Jones several years ago. It features the SWAN ROUSANT from the Reijersz coat-of-arms – a real show stopper!!

I'm so proud to present the latest story by our English cousin....Mike Crutchley! His note says:

*"Just got back from South Africa where I've been messing about in the northern territories bushveldt for a while and have been entirely out of touch.....it's not always easy to turn an original concept into reality, and my original idea was to get behind Amelia Ryerse's mind and ended up focusing on her Victorian infatuation with wealth. There was insufficient time and space to deal with her depression and hypochondria, her 'poor little me' attitude and her family battles. You could write a saga on the woman and still have loads on the cutting floor"*

No need to apologize Mike.....we think it's a great piece of writing. Save those other topics for another day! And speaking of another day.....he has come up with another story-line idea that sounds amazing! He makes me promise not to give his secret away ...so stay tuned.

Phyllis Ryerse



## Fun kids stuff!

Jacob Harmon FenleySinclair was born January 1, 2000, thus becoming the NEW YEARS MILLENNIUM BABY for Brant County, Ontario!

Jacob's parents are listed on pg 234, #2954 in our Ryerse-Ryerson family book!

\*\*\*\*\*

Jack Robert David Ryerson, born 30 October 2003 is only a few months old but he has dual citizenship! He is American and Australian! He is the only male heir to the Rev. Egerton Ryerson in the 7<sup>th</sup> generation! Pg 341, #4468

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USA

Subscription Rate \$12 year

Submissions Welcome & Encouraged!

~~Ryerse@BellSouth.net~~

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[Ryerse@BellSouth.net](mailto:Ryerse@BellSouth.net)

[Ryerse\\_Ryerson\\_Family@yahoo.com](mailto:Ryerse_Ryerson_Family@yahoo.com)

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## A Celebration of The Life and Times of Thomas Arthur Ryerson Sr.

by his grandson – Thomas Ryerson



September 2004 will mark the 10th anniversary of the passing of my grandfather, Tom Ryerson Sr., a visionary and an entrepreneur who embraced the future with a human touch. He always looked to the good side of people and believed anything was possible if a person worked hard enough.

Tom Sr. is a descendant of Joseph Ryerson. His great grandfather was the Rev. Edwy M. Ryerson and his father was William Edwy ("Ed") Ryerson. Born in Port Dover, ON, "Ed" left Canada in 1901 for South Africa and joined the British Army to fight the Boers. Ed found his niche in the Royal Field Artillery and after the war traveled with his regiment to serve in India in 1902 as a peacekeeper.

By 1906 Ed was with the Royal Field Artillery located Birmingham, England. On Dec 17, 1906, at the Aston Register Office in Birmingham, he married Florence Annie Mallison, born in 1881 in Newsouthgate, Edmonton, (an area of northeast London). She was the daughter of Henry Thomas & Mary Ann (Moore) Mallison. Florence was 25 and lived on her own a couple of streets over from Ed. After their marriage they lived on Erskine Street, near the Barracks.

Sometime after the birth of their first child, Sonny, the couple moved from Birmingham to London, perhaps to be closer to Florence's parents. At the time of second child Katie's birth in 1910, they lived in Paddington, which was in west London. By April of 1912 they lived in the east London suburb of Walthamstow, close to Florence's parents. After the move to Walthamstow, Ed was ready for a change and his officer, who was a Cunard, got him a job as a steward working on ships. By April of 1912 he was working for the White Star Line, narrowly surviving the sinking of the **TITANIC**.



Almost a year ago, I was able to visit the place of his birth in London, England. The house in which he was born (18 Salop Road, Walthamstow 2003) didn't look any different from the hundreds of others in London, but this place was special to me for it was my connection to England.

Ed and Florence's third child was **Thomas Arthur Ryerson** who was born at 18 Salop Road, Walthamstow, London, England, on May 13<sup>th</sup> 1912. He was baptized on June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1913 at St. Oswald's, St. Michael & All Angels Parish of the Diocese of St. Albans, Walthamstow. An exhaustive search has failed to turn up his birth certificate in England and the author has had to rely on White Star's records and a copy of his baptism record. It is thought that with all the trauma of the Titanic tragedy, Ed and Florence may have

## Thomas Ryerson Sr. - continued



neglected to officially register Tom's birth. His Ontario Drivers License gave his birth date as May 13, 1913, so there may have been some confusion created by not having his birth officially registered. Tom celebrated May 13<sup>th</sup> as his birthday, and had told the author it was in 1912, and his word is what we shall go on. Walthamstow these days has been swallowed up by the city of London.

***At r. Tomie age 4  
Glasgow - 1916***

We believe that Tom was named for Thomas Williams, who was his step-grandfather. But perhaps the name may have come from Tom's maternal grandfather, who was Henry Thomas Mallison. We are pretty sure the Arthur in his name came from Tom's true grandfather, who was the late George Arthur.

To be closer to his new vocation as a Ship's Steward, in the fall of 1913 Ed moved his family to 1 May Tree Road in Bitterne, an area in East Southampton. Southampton was one of the main shipping ports of England. It was at this location that Ed and Florence's 4<sup>th</sup> child, Will, was born in May of 1914.

Southampton was a convenient place to live if you were involved in shipping, but not so great when another country threatened to attack. It would be one of the first places to be hit. On August 14<sup>th</sup> 1914, the Great War had begun and Ed Ryerson knew Germany meant business. Ed was not going to risk his family to the German forces and several months after war was declared he moved his family far north to Glasgow, Scotland. Here he found them a home at 527 Baltic Street, in the Bridgeton District of Glasgow.

It was a wise move for on January 19<sup>th</sup> 1915, German Zeppelins began raids on England and on May 31<sup>st</sup> 1915, they bombed London for the first time. The rest of the coast of England, including Southampton, was next.

On March 1<sup>st</sup> 1915 in Glasgow, Ed enlisted in the 159<sup>th</sup> Gun Brigade of the Royal Field Artillery, returning to military service after 4 years. It is believed that Ed participated in the Battle of the Somme in which 58,000 British Soldiers were killed on the first day. Ed must have had 9 lives like a cat, because like the Boer War

and the Titanic, he survived the Great War too. Back in Scotland, Florence gave birth to their 5<sup>th</sup> child, Ron on January 29<sup>th</sup> 1918 at the family home in Glasgow. At that time, Ed's occupation was listed as Ship Steward-Quarter Master Sergeant Royal Field Artillery.

A week before the Armistice was signed, Ed left France and returned to Scotland. He was posted to the Reserve Brigade in December and the following May he was transferred to Class Z Reserve. On May 12<sup>th</sup> 1919 his service with the colors ended and on March 31<sup>st</sup> 1920, he was discharged on demobilization. Florence was expecting her 6<sup>th</sup> and last child that summer and it was decided that the family would return to Canada.

Ed had been away from his mother country for twenty years. Now he saw a better future for his family in Canada. Ed had heard of the Soldiers Settlement Board in Canada and arranged to purchase land there at a reduced rate through the 'Soldiers Settlement Scheme.' This Government scheme allowed veterans the opportunity to buy land and begin new careers as farmers.

In April of 1920, the family left Glasgow on a steamer and headed for Halifax, Canada where they boarded a train for Montreal, Quebec and a second train which took them to their destination at Freeman Station, now a part of Burlington, ON. Here Ed worked at an apple orchard as a pruner while arranging the land deal with the Canadian Government. In May 1920 Ed was able to buy 20 acres in Middlesex County, about 45 minutes west of London, ON. The actual farm was located between the small villages of Newbury and Wardsville.

It was said that when the family first came over to Canada, it was cold, and they still wore the traditional Scottish dress from Glasgow. They had taken a wagon from the train station in Wardsville to their new home on the farm. People in the area felt sorry for the kids, so they made and supplied warmer clothes for them.

In June of 1920, Ed and Florence had the last addition to their family, when 6<sup>th</sup> child Ralph was born in the red brick one story home. They now had 5 boys and one girl. The Ryerson name was in good hands.

Ed started his farm with one horse. Within a year, his oldest son Sonny was running a team of horses plowing the county roads. There was another team of horses for the farm. The farm consisted of the house and barn, plus basic farm equipment such as a plough, disc, harrow, and a tractor. They also had a horse drawn buggy. There were corn and apples and hay in the fields and chickens in the coop. Ed had bought almost everything he had on credit.

Ed worked for the County of Middlesex during the summer, on the roads with Sonny, as well as running

## **Thomas Ryerson Sr. - continued**

the farm. They sold eggs from the hens in Newbury, and there was an apple orchard in front of the house. The children walked 4 miles to S.S. #11 school near Newbury and the family attended the Methodist Church in Wardsville. This was a great new life for the Ryerson children. Eight-year-old Tom would have many more childhood memories on the farm than he would being raised in Industrial England. Ed knew there was a better life than the factories of mother England.

However, Ed was a restless man, and possibly the farming life wasn't for him. Or, maybe living on credit finally caught up with him. Whatever the reason, Ed made a severe change in his family's life in January of 1922. Ed decided that he wanted a fresh start and wanted to homestead in Northern Ontario. Somehow he arranged a land grant located about 63 KM east of North Bay, ON. The land consisted of 50 acres on the St. Antoine's Creek, which ran into the Mattawa River. Mattawa, ON, with a population of about 1,000 people, was the nearest town to the land that Ed settled on.

Florence probably stayed behind with the children to arrange the transfer of the farm back to the crown and the paying off of some of the debts while Ed went on ahead up north to prepare the land for his family. He worked dawn to dusk cutting trees, dragging them with a horse and chain, and piling them up on the bank of the creek, so that when spring thaw came, the logs could roll into the water and could be floated to the mill in Mattawa. This would be how he would earn an income for his family.

Soon after the river ice broke, Ed began to work on a cabin, and it was about this time, 3 months after first arriving in the area, that his family joined him from Wardsville by train. The family first lived in a tent built from pine tree boughs. The children would wake up in the mornings to find wildlife on their beds! What a change for Florence. First she was taken from her native England, and then transplanted to a farm, and now she was in the Ontario northland cooking the family meals over an open fire! It seemed like there were always pine needles in the food! But life for the children was wonderful; exploring in the woods, helping to chop down trees, and the nature and wildlife they would have seen. Katie remembers her and her siblings eating artichokes in Mattawa. Ed became involved with the Seventh Day Adventist Church at this time and was asked to teach school there, for which he somehow found the time.

The family worked hard, and soon the log cabin took shape. It was built with notched logs and pine boughs for the roof and the kids remember that it always leaked the rain. Everybody helped dig a garden and they could produce once it was ripe. Ed and his children, including Tom, were all in their glory. However,

Florence knew that winter was coming, and the log cabin was not yet finished. Canadian winters are nothing like English winters. Florence already experienced this in Wardsville. In England Florence might see some snow, but mostly it was damp and cold. In Ontario there was literally snow by the foot! And now she was in the north, where snow was double what it was in the south. Florence had enough and the children remember her saying to Ed, "This is God's country, give it back to the Indians!" And with that, she loaded up the six children and headed back south to civilization. We're not sure why Florence picked Winona but this is where she went. Ed soon admitted defeat and left the land up in Mattawa. It was a land grant, so apparently there was no paperwork. He just walked away from almost a year of daily work and followed his family.

Ed first found work as the night watchman at the E.D. Smith jam plant and then got a better paying job at Firestone Rubber & Tire. In 1924, Ed moved his family from Winona into the city of Hamilton where Florence no doubt felt right at home.

About 1926 Ed landed a job as a clerk in the Post Office and a year later took the exams to become a customs officer. He got the best score at the time, ever! Here Ed found his true calling. He enjoyed his work at a customs officer, and was finally out of the grind of factory work.

It was here in Hamilton that Tom and his siblings heard for the first time of their father's adventures in the Boer War and on the Titanic. They listened as Ed would discuss this and other events of his life over the fence with his Hamilton neighbors. They also heard about India and the Great War as well as the many other ships on which Ed had been a steward. He never told these stories directly to his children. They always heard them as he talked to other people.

About 1928, Florence asked Tom to quit school at Delta Collegiate where he was in Grade 9. She wanted him to earn a living and start contributing financially to the family. Tom's first job was working at a butcher shop for \$6 a week. He worked from 8 AM to 6 PM, riding his bicycle to and from work. In a short time he found work as a stock boy with Levy Brothers Wholesale Jewelers.

In 1931 Tom decided to go out west during the harvest where he could earn \$4 a day! He bought a used motorcycle and headed out to Alberta! In Alberta he had an accident with a car, and he hurt his knee. He wound up getting a job as a cook in a threshing camp. On his return to Ontario, he had another accident with the motorcycle on a curve in the road up north.

Tom's father Ed must have longed to get back on a farm, and about 1932 he bought one in Milgrove, moving the family from Hamilton out there. Here Ed could enjoy his call back to nature. It was similar to life

## Thomas Ryerson Sr. - continued

in Mattawa. They used the nearby spring as a fridge to keep food cold. They used gas lamps, and there was a wood stove in the kitchen. It was here that Ed's children remember him stepping in cat droppings on the stairs in the house and angrily tossing the poor animal right through the screen door! Tom's love for cats may have begun right here as he felt sorry for the animals after what his father did.

About 1934 Ed and Florence returned to Hamilton, leaving the boys behind to run the farm. Ed also rented farms at Westover and Carlisle. Sonny, Tom, Will, Ron and Ralph were extremely busy keeping these three farms operational and making money. They raised animals as well as cash cropping. Tom also worked as a produce salesman, picked berries, and even dug ditches.



(Tom and Sparky, Hamilton about 1934)

By 1935 Tom left the farm work and moved back into Hamilton, sharing a place with his parents and his sister Katie. He just wanted a regular job instead of the odd jobs and farm work. The other 4 boys stayed with the farm for another couple of years. However, it seemed after Sonny died in the spring of 1937 from T.B., the other three lost the desire for farming and they all returned to Hamilton.

That year Tom began working as a driver for the American News Service for \$40 a week, delivering the paper to stores in Hamilton and collecting the money from the vendors. He held this job the next four years. It was a good job until they began cutting back his pay. By 1939 he was making only \$15 a week doing the same job he was doing in 1935. Then the newspaper went on strike, and Tom was out of a job.

By this time war clouds loomed over England again and in 1939, Ed and Florence decided it was time to return back. Ed's health wasn't the best. He had war injuries that had plagued him. So in June of 1939, Ed gave his notice at the Customs Office and he and Florence, and their sons Ron and Ralph returned to England, settling at Pitsea, in Essex, located west of Walthamstow. Both Ron and Ralph enlisted in the R.A.F.

In Canada, Tom enlisted in the R.C.A.F. on October 17<sup>th</sup> at the old exposition grounds in Hamilton. He knew

engines very well, and passed an exam to train as an Aero Engine Mechanic. The Air Force was very selective but Tom did well and got in. Tom was stationed in St. Thomas at the Technical Training Centre.



On Dec 31, 1939, at a New Years Dance held at the Catholic Culture Centre on Central Avenue in London, Tom met Aylda May Bowley. Aylda was the daughter of Frederick George & Mary Hilda Bowley and was born on May 19<sup>th</sup> 1911 in London. Aylda worked as a stenographer and also had a degree in Bookkeeping. They say that opposites attract and that would have been Tom and Aylda. Tom was quiet, gentle and very private, while Aylda was outgoing, opinionated and sociable.



Tom and Aylda hit it off well and they wasted no time in making things official. They were married on February 17, 1940 at Calvary United Church in London, 6 weeks after they met. Aylda was given in marriage by her brother Gordon, while her other 2 brothers, Walter and George, were ushers. The wedding reception was held at "Brighton Villa," which was Aylda's family home. Her late father bought the house at 365 Wortley Road in 1900, and it stayed in the

Bowley name for over 65 years. Tom's sister Kate attended the wedding. After the wedding, Tom and Aylda went on a short trip.

## Thomas Ryerson Sr. - continued

April of 1940, Tom was re-stationed to Trenton, promoted to Sergeant and in July 1941 Tom and Aylda became parents with the birth of their son, William Edwy (Bill). Tom's parents, Ed and Florence, sent their best wishes from England.



### **Christmas card 1940**

In the spring of 1943 Tom was re-stationed again to Saskatoon, SK, where he was promoted to Stripe Sergeant. In May 1943 Aylda and Bill followed by train from Trenton.

A year later Tom was re-stationed to Gimli, MB. Gimli is a little fishing village founded by Icelandic

peoples. Initially, the family lived in a building that was once a butcher shop. Tom & Aylda used the butcher block in the building as their kitchen table! Tom and Aylda's 2<sup>nd</sup> son, Rick, was born in Gimli in June 1944. A month later the young family was re-stationed one last time, this time to the huge training base at Aylmer. Here Tom was a Flight Engineer Training Instructor.

At the time Tom was stationed at the Aylmer Base, so were two of Aylda's close relatives, Clarence Thomas and Fred Bowley Jr. Clarence Thomas was a first year student in the Flight Engineer program and may have been taught by Tom. When Clarence graduated from the Aylmer Base, Tom and Aylda held a beautiful buffet lunch at her mothers' home in London to celebrate. Clarence's wife Terry was amazed at how Tom & Aylda made her feel welcome and treated her like a good friend, even though it was the first time she had met them.

When the Second World War ended, Tom was given an Honorable Discharge from the R.C.A.F. on July 17, 1945. He and his family moved in with Aylda's mother, Mary Hilda, at "Brighton Villa" and began attending Calvary United Church again. Young Bill began Kindergarten at Wortley Road Public School in September 1946.

Tom found work doing odd jobs. By the spring of 1946 he had purchased \$50 worth of hand tools and found work on various construction crews in London. He built new homes with Herb McClure and helped build the Chelsea Bridge over the Thames River at Adelaide Street with McKay-Cocker. Aylda and the boys would

walk from "Brighton Villa" to where he was working, and bring Tom his lunch.

With no formal training in construction or carpentry, Tom was literally learning 'on the job!' Within a year or so, Tom began to build his own houses. The first house he built and sold was on Langmuir Avenue in East London about 1948. Tom bought the lot, built a house, and then sold it. Repeating this several times, he was becoming more skilled – and establishing credibility and trust with the banks and mortgage companies.

By 1948, Aylda's brother George and his young family moved into "Brighton Villa" and quarters may have been getting cramped. Tom's decided the next house he built, he would live in. In early 1949, Tom and Aylda were able to finance the purchase of about 8 lots (one side of a block) on Ross Street in East London, now known as Bellwood Heights. At 145 Elliott (on the corner of Ross) he built a bungalow style house and in June 1949, moved his family into the yet unfinished house! They lived in the basement while Tom got the top half finished. The two-car garage featured a very steep roof with a barn like door in the center of the peak. Tom used this building for storing building supplies and connected the two with a 'breezeway.'

### **"Ryerson Construction Co. Ltd.**

**General Contractors**" was officially founded at this time. Tom built and sold the houses and Aylda did all the paperwork. It was a great combination. He also became a member of the London Home Builders Association, perhaps even a charter member.

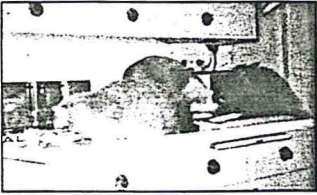
In December 1949 Tom's father Ed died at the age of 70. There was little money on either side of the pond, and not only was Tom unable to attend his father's funeral, but Ed was buried without a gravestone. Tom's mother Florence went to live with his brother Ron. Once Tom's business became a success, he was able to send his mother a monthly allowance until her death in September 1968. Her son Ron had her body cremated, and it's not known if her ashes were buried or remained in an urn.

Once Tom built on the 8 lots on the north side of Ross, he bought and built on the 8 lots on the south side. By 1951 Tom bought some lots along Taylor Street up to Huron, and it is thought he bought some land to the east on McNay Street. In the summer of 1951 Tom built a house at the corner of Taylor & Huron. This house featured a single door two car garage and a large cement porch long the front of the house. This house was also unique because it was made entirely out of cement blocks. Tom was not afraid to experiment with new building techniques. Even before this house was completed, Tom and his family moved in, either selling or renting the Elliott Street house. To the best of the author's knowledge, this is the only blockhouse Tom ever built.

## Thomas Ryerson Sr. - continued

In 1951, Tom began building houses in Byron, a community a little west of London, and now swallowed up by the city. Tom built a home for a London Life employee, and by word of mouth, he ended up building several homes in the area for other London Life employees.

They lived at Huron Street for a year, and in the summer of 1952 Tom built a house at 301 Belfield, which thru renumbering is now 291 Belfield St. This house was located about a block and a half north of the Huron Street house. The bungalow style house was made in the more traditional way.



Tom began to keep a family cat, and later his home was always open to strays. At one time in the 1970's he had about 10 cats in his house! He had his favorites, like the two

Siamese cats, Angel and Clarence, and several others, as well as the strays he took in. He would always try to find homes for the cats. That was one of his missions in life, to make sure that stray cats had homes. Tom supported the Ontario Humane Society, Pet Pride (*the largest shelter for lifetime care of homeless cats*), and the Anti-Vivisection Society (*against animal testing*). He was also a member of the Canadian Wildlife Federation. It was at Belfield that Bill learned cats could travel up cement block. The family cat had been scared by a neighborhood dog and tore straight into the garage, straight up the block wall and into the safety of the ceiling rafters!

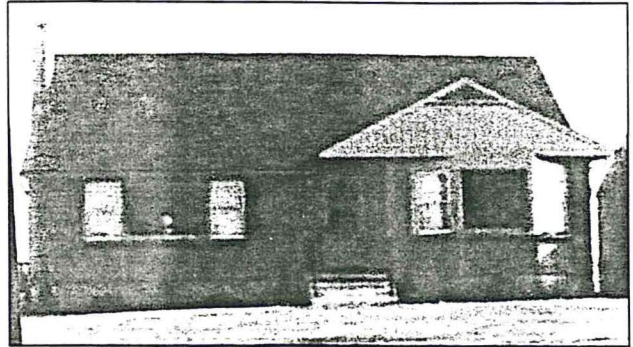


Tom's cats were always spoiled. By the 1970's, Tom fed his cats a mix of Roistered BBQ Chicken and hard and soft cat food. He had a small bar fridge in his basement designated for the cat's food.

Tom was an excellent trim carpenter, always trying out different things in the houses he built. He used Pocket Doors, built in cabinets, cupboards, desks, and laundry chutes. He utilized attic space for storage and basement access to backyards. He used every available space in a home - none was wasted.

A year after they moved into the Belfield house, Tom and his family moved one last time into what would be one of the best houses Tom built at the time. It was at 699 Kipps Lane, on the corner of Belfield then in London Township, as everything north of Huron Street was past the city limits. The Kipp's Lane house featured a 3 car cement block garage, and was built deep so

wood and trim could be stored in racks at the back as well as some of his heavy-duty tools. There was a milk box in the lower wall of the kitchen where the delivery people left fresh milk and bread. The property also boasted a huge garden. Gardening was another of Tom's passions, especially once he retired. Tom lived in this house for 35 years.



Tom's office at Kipps Lane was very roomy, with a large steel desk in front of the window that faced Kipps Lane, and a drafting table on the opposite wall. There was a large cupboard that stored scores of blue prints, and several filing cabinets. He had become a skilled draftsman and he could have qualified as an architect had he pursued it.

Once in the Kipps Lane house, the family seemed to enjoy life a little more. Tom would make his two sons a skating rink every winter and he would play hockey with them. When Tom was young himself he played the equivalent of Junior 'C' hockey. When son Bill played hockey with his buddies at work, he could brag that he had the oldest shoulder pads of anyone on the team, as he used his fathers' old leather ones from when he was a lad!

Tom also enjoyed watching baseball, and took his sons to a ball game in Detroit. He had season's tickets at Labatt Park and beginning in the early 1950's, he and his family took in as many London Majors (*Intercounty Baseball League*) games as they could. Tom ended up building houses for a couple of the players on the London Majors team!

Tom bought a pool table for his two boys and would occasionally play against them. Son Bill recalls that Tom "was pretty darn good at it" and he couldn't beat him until Tom was at least in his sixties!

Tom was also content to stay at home and relaxing in his garden or watching TV. Aylda liked to get out and was known to go to New York City once a year with a girlfriend. In the mid 1960's Aylda began taking bus trips to Akron, Ohio to hear the famed Rex Humbard speak at the Cathedral of Tomorrow.

Beginning in 1955, the company grew to where Tom had about 30-40 employees. There was George Feenstra who operated a truck with a floating bed trailer

## Thomas Ryerson Sr. - continued

which carried a Bulldozer.. He dug the foundations, back-filled and landscaped with the bulldozer. There was the foundation and cement crew led by the Ukrainian-born Alec. Tom also employed two teams of framers and trim carpenters. Once the house was framed, Bob Brown's crew went in and did the insulation and lathing and shingling the roof. Bob Monk was the main plasterer. Tom also subcontracted Douglas Plastering and Proudfoot Plastering. Bob Haggerty did the wiring, and Bob Patton was Ryerson Construction's official plumber. Bob and his wife Joyce also chummed with Tom and Aylda. Doug Rombough did all the brickwork. Alf Miller was the tinsmith and made the furnaces that Tom used., Alf was also Tom's golf buddy. Ray Twist made the iron railings and John Pederson did the more specialty railings. On rainy days Tom's hourly employee's kept busy by painting trim, windows and soffett lumber.

Back in those days the workers were paid in cash. Aylda would figure exactly what each employee would be paid after taxes, etc. She would then make a note of how the pay would be broken down: the number of twenties, tens, fives, twos, ones, and then she counted out the change required. She would then add up the total amount of bills and coins needed from the bank. When she came back from the bank, Bill would help her count out what each worker got, bills and coin, and put it in the employee's pay envelope. They wouldn't seal them up until all the money was accounted for. If there was money left over, or not enough to finish, then Aylda and Bill would have to double check all the completed pay envelopes. Once it all balanced, then Bill sealed up all the envelopes and Aylda and her mother Hilda would drive out to each employee's house and drop the pay off. They did this every Thursday.



Aylda played a very important role in the company, keeping everything running smoothly. She did all the bookwork. It has been said that when she walked by a Ryerson site, the workers worked in double time until she was out of sight. She commanded a lot of respect. Or fear!

In the early days Tom did all his own cement work, with Alec in charge. They actually set the forms up, mixed the concrete, and the laborers would wheelbarrow it into the forms. When the company began building 25 houses a year, Tom began to buy his cement in bulk delivered by a cement truck.

Once son Bill got his license in 1957, he was even more helpful. Bill took the attitude that just because he was the bosses' son he was not going to slack off. He always worked hard and was embarrassed when brother Rick fell asleep while leaning on a shovel at a jobsite!

By 1957 Tom's business was taking off by word of mouth. Lloyd Ashton, who worked at Ealing Hardware in London, highly recommended Ryerson to anyone who asked about new houses. Tom now began to build a line of homes that were more economical. Up to now he was known for his high quality, which came at a price. Now he consciously began to build selected homes that people could afford. His first economical home (*located in the Fairmount Subdivision*) sold for \$12,500. By comparison, in 1958, a Ryerson house on Bloomfield Drive sold for \$20,000.

Once Tom had developed the Belfield and Kipps Lane area, he turned his attention to the property at McNay Street. He built houses along Huron Street to McNay, then up McNay and east on Justamere. This area had been "Justamere Farm" and had been owned by Mr. Fuller.

In 1958 Tom set a new standard. An unheard of standard. He took a trade-in on a house! John Wray liked the Ryerson house at 52 Bloomfield Drive, but was having a hard time with the \$20,000 price tag. Tom told John not to worry, that he would give him \$12,000 credit for his old house on Erie Avenue. Tom would do any necessary repairs on the house and in turn sell it for a profit. John ended up selling the Ryerson house for \$22,000 a mere 8 years later.

Tom was not without error however. In September 1959 he built a custom home on Regent Street but had taken the measurements for the house from the wrong property line stakes. This resulted in the new house being 2 feet too close to the property line! The only thing he could do was buy the lot next door and give two feet to his customer, which he did. Tom then built a smaller house on the newly purchased lot!

Tom attracted new customers with his reasonable prices and high quality. Other builders at the time had to compete with Ryerson. Ryerson was able to offer an exceptionable personal touch. The employees of Ryerson cared about what they were doing and the customer could sense that.

Probably because he was raised in an environment of the construction process, Tom's eldest son Bill had a dream of becoming an architect. However Aylda convinced Bill to enroll into the University of Western Ontario in an Engineering course in the fall of 1959. During the summers Bill worked with the Dept. of Highways. In 1963 he changed his course of studies, and went into General Science course at the University of Windsor, graduating in 1965 with a BSc. and winning

## Thomas Ryerson Sr. - continued

the General Science Award. Aylda helped find her son a job as a Computer Programmer for London Life. Bill retired recently from that company.

Rick, Tom's younger son, initially followed a career as a draftsman. He worked for his father for a couple of years but by 1966, Rick decided instead to leave drafting and travel the world. With his friend Bob Lee, Rick left for Australia. They traveled to Singapore, Malaysia, and South Africa before ending up in England about 1968. Rick married and moved to Australia where he became a project manager and a civil engineer, an occupation he still pursues today although he plans to retire in 2005.

In the mid 1960's, when it was obvious that the business was not going to be taken over by his sons, Tom began to scale his work force down and set up a plan to subcontract them when jobs came along, an idea which worked out well for all involved.

In May 1964 Tom & Aylda gave Bill and his new bride Louise a house located at 56 Jacqueline Street in Chelsea Green in London and furnished it for them. Tom got the 60-year-old house as a trade in. He and Aylda figured it was a good start for the young couple.

About 1964 Tom began to develop the land around the barn on McNay Street. In 1965 he built a house on the corner of McNay and Justamere and then in 1972 he filled the last of the empty lots with two houses.

By February of 1965 Tom began to use a real estate agent to sell his properties. It is possible that Tom just didn't want to be the salesman anymore.

By 1968, Bill and Louise had two children and Aylda spent a lot of time with her two grandchildren who called her "Mum" and called Tom "Tomp-Tom." She enjoyed taking them to Doidge Park in front of St. Joseph's Hospital in London.

Aylda and Tom began to plan for their retirement. Tom was still building a few houses and had plans for an apartment complex surrounded by townhouses, however this was not to be.

On December 18<sup>th</sup> 1970, as the result of a fall, Aylda died suddenly. It was a huge blow to her family who looked to her for guidance and a shock to the local community who knew her not only for her kindness and generosity but as a good business manager too. Aylda was buried at Woodlawn Cemetery in London.

After the death of his wife, Tom's sister Katie and her husband Stan came down from Ancaster to stay with him a while. Tom's grandson, the author of this article, spent most of the summers of 1971 and 1972 with him.

Many hours were spent caring and feeding Tom's 10 cats. They also time spent working in the garden and going for car rides.

Tom always kept burlap bags and a spade in the trunk of his car and if he happened to see a cat that had been killed on the side of the road, he would stop, place it in the bag with the shovel and bury it in a special area of his garden.

Tom also took his grandson to the construction sites that Tom was over seeing, such as the two houses on McNay Street and a duplex on Taylor Street. Tom Sr. was also a landlord, renting out several of his properties. The two Tom's (grandfather and grandson) collected rents as well.

Real estate agents knew the value of a Ryerson home. In 1975 Audrey Gleed, who herself owned a Ryerson home, was also selling a Ryerson home on Briarhill Avenue. One of the selling points of the house was that it was a Ryerson Built Home.

Tom returned to golfing about this time and he and grandson Tommy could be seen at the Fanshawe Golf Course. As Tom got better, he later played at Sunningdale, which was a private course. The author once played a round with him at Sunningdale in 1981 or 1982.

Tom's 2 ½ years of being single ended on July 19<sup>th</sup> 1972 when he met Winnifred Ruth McKitterick at a singles dance at the Wonderland Gardens in London. Wyn was the 48-year-old widow of Robert McKitterick, and had two teenaged children. Tom and Wyn danced together that night and later went out to dinner. Wyn was an avid golfer. She also played tennis and in later years enjoyed line dancing.

Like his first marriage, Tom didn't waste any time and he and Wyn were married on August 4<sup>th</sup> 1972 at the Church of St. Jude. Tom called up his son Bill, and asked him if he wanted to go to a wedding. Bill said sure, and asked who it was. Tom replied in a humorous deadpan tone, "Mine." It was a small ceremony. Bill, Louise, Tommy and Lisa attended, as well as Wyn's children, Wayne, 19, and Lynda, who was about 17. Tom and new family resided at 699 Kipps Lane.

After they were married, Wyn continued to work at her job for Avco Financial Services and Tom kept things in order on the home front and would have supper ready for her on some of her long nights. Wyn was very active and outgoing and was able to get Tom out of the house and to enjoy his retirement.

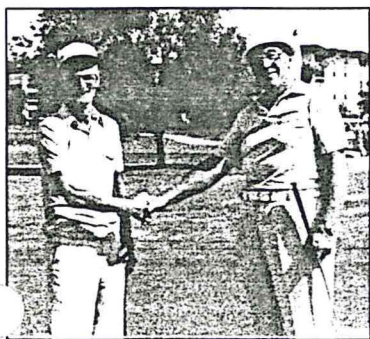
In February of 1974, Tom left London for the first time. He and Wyn left the cold of Canada and wintered in Arizona. In 1975, they decided to try Florida for a change and rented a Condo near Homosassa, which

## Thomas Ryerson Sr. - continued

is on the Gulf of Mexico. They would drive from London, Ontario to Florida every year until Tom retired.

In the spring of 1978 he was trying to get townhouses built on the empty lot to the west of Taylor Street, but met with too much resistance from the neighborhood and the City of London. Townhouses were still not acceptable, although townhouses now fill both of the empty lots Tom used to own; the one on Taylor, and the one on Regal. Tom's thinking was just too ahead of it's time.

The last job Tom and George took on was an addition to the home of David & Sharon Latta. After this job was completed in the fall of 1978, Ryerson Construction ceased to exist. It was probably hard for Tom to realize that he had been in the construction business for 30 years!

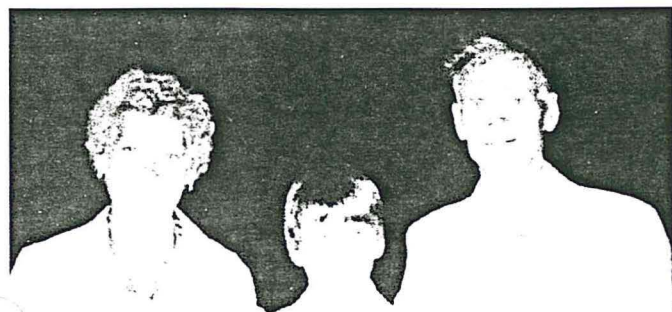


In 1979, now fully and officially retired, Tom and Wyn bought a condo in Fort Myers, Florida for \$30,000. Fort Myers was also on the Gulf of Mexico, about 150 miles south of Homosassa. In early 1979 while in Fort Myers, Tom underwent

an operation to replace a defective heart valve. During the surgery he had a stroke which led to the paralyzing of his left side.

After much therapy and determination, Tom recovered most of the use of his left side. During his recovery, Wyn drove them down to Fort Myers; they never missed a winter there.

Tom and Wyn also attended events that were important to grandson Tommy. In June 1978 they attended Tommy's grade 8 graduation, (picture below) and celebrated with Tommy standing up through the sunroof of Tom and Wyn's baby Lincoln Continental!



However, in December of 1986, while in Fort Myers, Tom developed double pneumonia in his lungs and was flown back to London for treatment at Westminster Hospital. By August 1987 it looked pretty serious, but like before, Tom bounced back. Tom was more determined than ever to overcome this latest challenge.

Over the years the Kipps Lane neighbourhood was going to the dogs. 40 years prior it was farmland but now it was north London and neighborhood gangs had moved in. Tom and Wyn were robbed, and they decided that was the last straw.

During 1987 they moved to a more secluded and private neighborhood on Doon Drive, which was near the Stoneybrook subdivision that Tom had built in the 60's and 70's.

In 1990 Tom was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Wyn cared for Tom but eventually he was moved into a long term care facility. He lived at Chateau Gardens in London until September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1994, when he died as a result of the Parkinson's. Tom was buried beside his first wife Aylda in Woodland Cemetery, London.

Wyn, Tom's second wife, and her son Wayne, continue to live at Doon Drive and still have the condo in Fort Myers.

Although Tom was a quiet and private man, and kept to himself, he unknowingly made a large contribution to the City of London with the construction of his high quality homes, which probably number about 500 over 30 years of operation. Many people continue to be original owners of Ryerson homes and have nothing but pleasant and warm memories of Tom & Aylda Ryerson.

I continue to have happy memories of my grandfather - who happened to build houses for a living. We became very close over the 2 summers I stayed with him as a boy. As I stood in front of the tenement house at 18 Salop Road in London, England where he was born, I said to myself, "This is where it all started." The journey was complete for me.

It's hard to believe he has been gone for 10 years, but the memories live on like they happened just yesterday.

*Tom*

(editors note: Thanks to Tom for allowing his extensive account of his grandfather's life to be condensed to fit our format.)

## WHAT'S NEW IN THE PAST LANE !

### A LONG Ryerson prayer

Vittoria area pioneer Joseph RYERSON had six sons, five of whom were eminent pioneer preachers. A great story is told about John Ryerson, one of the sons and a brother of Egerton who was a party to a clever scheme whereby the life of Richard Carr was saved after he had been sentenced to be hanged!

It happened in the village of Vittoria. The accused was charged with that heinous pioneer offence of ox stealing, for which he had been tried and was sentenced.

A certain Doctor Rolph, a friend of Rev. John Ryerson, connived with that gentleman, to save the life of the condemned man. It was arranged that the doctor would ride to Toronto on the swiftest horse available to intercede with the governor of the province to have the man pardoned. If the doctor did not return before the day set for execution, the Rev. Ryerson was to pray as long as he possibly could in order to delay the carrying out of the sentence, hoping in the meantime for the arrival of Dr. Rolph with the pardon.

The fateful day arrived but the good doctor with the pardon was not to be found, nor was there any news of him. Soon the sheriff arrived at the jail and the man was led out to die. The unfortunate fellow mounted the gallows, the customary preliminaries were soon over, the ropes adjusted and the sheriff nodded to the parson that all was ready for the minister's final prayer.

### REV. RYERSON began to pray!

The Rev. John Ryerson got slowly down on his knees and began to pray. He prayed for twenty minutes, which in those days was a common occurrence. Then it went on for forty minutes, then one hour when murmurs could be heard from the bystanders. He prayed on and on amid great restlessness, his tongue dry and his voice

becoming husky. The sun poured down on uncovered heads and the crowd began to grumble louder! On he fervently prayed when at last a cry rang out,

"Here comes the doctor!" The horseman rode right up to the foot of the scaffold scattering people right and left, his horse covered with foam. In his hand - the reprieve!

Nearly exhausted, Rev. John Ryerson brought his prayer to a close. The sheriff, upon being presented with the official papers, ordered Mr. Carr taken back to jail where, three months later, he was released!



A man of prayer -  
Rev. John Ryerson

## MYSTERY LADIES

**Dennis Ross** of Califon, N.J. sends us these pictures of two mystery ladies. He believes they might be sisters, Mary and Elizabeth, the children of James and Hannah (Allan) Ryerson. Elizabeth married Jacob Ross back in the early 1800's. They lived in Sussex Co., N.J. Can any of our readers confirm their identities? Contact Dennis at [akross@worldnet.att.net](mailto:akross@worldnet.att.net)

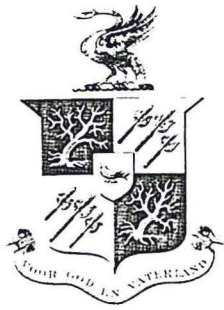


## JUST IN

This picture erases any doubt that Stephen Mahdi of Nepean, Ontario is extremely proud of his family! Yes, that's a tattoo!



## A Chat with Phyllis



Thanks to Tom for the insightful look at his grandfather's life for this issue. We welcome story ideas from all our readers. Send'em in!!

CAN YOU REMEMBER the 'family tree' nailed to Vern Ryerse's barn at the 1994 Bicentennial Reunion? It held over 7000 names and was 6 by 60 feet long – so long that it wrapped around the corner of the barn and extended clear to the barn door! Everyone had a great time finding themselves on the tree and discovering how they connected to the other branches!

### OTHER Family NEWS:

- ✿ Tom Ryerson spoke to the Norfolk Historical Society at Eva Brook Donly Museum at 7 p.m. on Oct 6, 2004.
- ✿ For a look at an early typewritten draft of the 1916 Ryerson Genealogy written by Albert Winslow Ryerson, see Family History Library microfilm #1320913.1
- ✿ Please have a look at [www.geocities.com/tomryerson/rassoc](http://www.geocities.com/tomryerson/rassoc) for neat information on the family and information on ordering shirts, Port Ryerse Journals and family history books. (There are only 30 copies left from the original 800 published in 1994 and 1996)
- ✿ PLEASE NOTE some important e-mail and postal mailing address changes below.

*Phyllis Ryerse*

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[Ryerse@Adolphia.net](mailto:Ryerse@Adolphia.net)

[Ryerse\\_Ryerson\\_Family@yahoo.com](mailto:Ryerse_Ryerson_Family@yahoo.com)

### The 51st Annual Ryerse-Ryerson Family Reunion

was held July 11, 2004 with 101 family members in attendance. Stephen Mahdi traveled the farthest distance to attend the reunion from Nepean, ON. The runner up was Tony Ryerson Lister who came from Ithaca, NY, Tony descends from the Nova Scotia Ryerson Family.

There were contests for the longest hair, shortest hair, and Whitney Stratford won the prize for the craziest looking monkey socks! The youngest child there was Preston Chithalen at 4 months. The eldest gentleman present was Murray Madge at 86 years, and the eldest lady was Bertha Ryerse Scott. The longest married couple was Doug and Marg Specht with 51 years. The afternoon held Potato Sack Races, 3-Legged Races, Wheelbarrow races, the ever-popular shoe kick and the famous tug of war. Elections resulted in Eleanor Chithalen and Margaret Ryerse Brown being elected to share the Presidency. Jeanette Ryerson was elected Vice President and Tom Ryerson remains the Secretary-Treasurer for the 5th year. We appreciate all the special people it takes to keep the reunion running, even after 50 years! The next Ryerse-Ryerson Family Picnic & Reunion will be held on Sunday July 10, 2005.



**Reunion Feast!**



**Sack Races!**