

March 6, 2019 · by 2oldguyswalking ·

**Owner History:**

This forlorn and empty mansion known as Sidbrook Villa, part of Lots 13 & 14, Concession B, or 411 King Street East, Cobourg Ontario was built as an elegant two storey summer home for Henry Mason. For two decades now it has been neglected and is deteriorating quickly. The only history to be found on the original owner Henry Mason is that his name appears on the Act to Incorporate the Cobourg and Peterborough Railway Company, 10th November 1852. The original 2 storey flat roofed brick villa was built on one hundred acres of land in 1857.

In 1868, the original structure was altered by the second owner Major David Campbell who added the “High Italianate” design, a large west wing and a hip roof. The Villa and its additions were designed by Kivas Tulley the architect later known for his designs of Victoria Hall and St. Peters Church in the town of Cobourg. After Campbell died in 1881, Sidbrook was occupied by his ward May Jane Angell and her husband John Vance Graveley who resided in the villa until 1900. The next owner William Abbott of Pittsburgh (an associate of Andrew Carnegie) and his wife Annie Wainwright added a third floor addition, a two storey Beaux-arts corinthian portico, a balcony and porches on the east and south (now demolished) side of the building. This property was the summer home of the Abbott family until 1950 when it was sold to the Hass family of Toronto for a summer home. In 1952 the home was again sold for use as a private hospital by the Walker family. At this time the Walkers accomplished major restorations and operated a Private Chronic Care Hospital until their retirement in 2002. The family lived in an apartment on the third floor of the building and it is said that Mr. Walker, a painter by trade had a great passion for gardening. The building and grounds were always kept in immaculate condition.

It should be noted that part of the property’s historical value is that it has a direct association with many important and influential figures of Cobourg history, names like Mason, Campbell, Graveley and Abbott. David Campbell was born at Smiddygreen, County Fife, Scotland. David retired from the military in 1826 with the rank of Major. With his brother Lt. Col. Robert Campbell they took up a large land grant of some 2200 acres surveyed in 1819 along the Trent River in Seymour Township in Upper Canada that included the present day town of Campbellford. Robert Campbell achieved an impressive record in the Napoleonic Wars and died in Campbellford in 1836. David served as the Crown Land Agent for the township from 1832-39. While living in Cobourg, David formed a syndicate in 1836 with Nesbitt Kirkchoffer and James Cockburn (a Father of Confederation) to develop ‘Campbell’s ford’ later Campbellford in his honor, the calmest and shallowest stretch of the river as a village in 1876. David Campbell died at his Cobourg estate Sidbrooke (sic) in 1881 at the age of 97 and was buried in St. Peters Anglican Church Cemetery. Campbell was never married, his adopted daughter Mary Jane Angell was later married to John Vance Graveley a one-time mayor of Cobourg.

Lt. Col. John Vance Graveley was born in Cobourg in 1840 and achieved his formal education at Upper Canada College to become an attorney with a law practice in Cobourg. Joining the Cobourg Rifles in 1864 and served with the 47th Regiment during the Fenian Raids. (The Fenian Brotherhood was an independent armed force of Irish American Civil War veterans, who raided Canadian territory from New Brunswick to Manitoba. The raids were intended to seize and hold parts of Canada hostage in return for Irish independence). When the 40th Regiment was formed in 1876, Graveley was named as the commanding officer with the rank of Lt. Col. John Graveley was elected to the town council in 1876 and served as the mayor for six years from 1880-85. He died in October 1913 at Toronto.

William Latham Abbott, was likely one of the most notable owners of Sidbrook was originally from Pittsburgh, and was a one-time chairman of Carnegie Brothers and Company representing prominent Americans who made Cobourg a famous summer resort. Abbott joined Carnegie in 1871 as a clerk at Union Steel Mills and rose to Chairman of Carnegie, Phipp's & Company and went on as a Director of Keystone Bridge prior to the Homestead/Pinkerton Rebellion/Homestead Massacre Lockout & Strike in 1892. He became a Member of Carnegie Veterans Association and was later forced out of the Carnegie Company on his failure to end the steel-workers labor union at Homestead. William Abbott retired after making millions as a partner in the Carnegie Steel Company when it merged to form the United States Steel Company. U.S. Steel was a merger formed in 1901 by banker J.P. Morgan, industrialist Andrew Carnegie, Charles Schwab and Elbert Gary. Abbott spent summers in Ontario and wintered in Florida. Abbott with several partners developed Florida's Palm Beach in the 1890's and bought the famous Coconut Grove Hotel there.

### **Relevant Legislation:**

*Since the hospital closed in 2002 the building remained unoccupied and was starting to deteriorate quickly. In 2004 this vacant building was nominated for an individual designation. One year later the Local Conservancy Advisory Committee recommended designation to town council. In 2006 a notice to designate was approved, the property owner filed a Notice of objection and the matter was referred to the Ontario Conservation Review Board. At a CRB hearing in December 2006, the property owner failed to attend to present any objections and thus a by-law was passed by Council in 2007 and was registered on the said property title. Since 2008, many property standard complaints were received including one for a loss of heritage value. Five Property Standard orders were issued to the property owner to board up and secure the building.*

*When Cobourg town council approved rezoning from Institutional to Residential, the property owner Evan Karras, proposed a six unit residential condominium development. The development floorplan included six upscale condominiums, keeping the interior detailing intact with common areas and hallways to remain public space to preserve "the flow and character of the interior space". It was suggested that the building envelope, structure, interior woodwork and plaster were in good condition. It was also noted that the basement required water proofing because of damage that had occurred. For unknown reasons the development proposal was eventually withdrawn.*

*In 2015, this property was designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act. Due to the historical significance of the hospital building, the Cobourg Heritage Advisory Committee was concerned that the property owner is allowing the property to deteriorate intentionally to allow for "demolition by neglect" which is defined as the destruction of a building through abandonment or lack of maintenance or alternately left open to vandals or vagrants".*

*Today this once magnificent building still sits empty. What is to be Sidbrook's future? Will anyone come forward to save this historic Cobourg icon or will its lifeline eventually be pulled?*

Regards, Ranger, 2OldGuysWalking

More info at:

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