

Self-Guided Walking Tour of Historic New Edinburgh

From the *NEN* archives (circa 2008), here is an outdoor activity that is physical-distancing friendly. Pull out this section and explore the neighbourhood's history!

By Paul McConnell and Inge Vander Horst

Rediscover New Edinburgh by strolling through this historic neighbourhood. Travel back in time 170 years while taking a closer look at some heritage gems. Most of these remarkable buildings are located within the original settlement of New Edinburgh, which was founded in 1832 by Scottish stonemason and entrepreneur, Thomas McKay.

McKay had been a major contractor for the Rideau Canal, including the entrance locks by Parliament Hill. When construction was completed in 1832, he encouraged his workers to settle on the land he had purchased around the Rideau Falls. There was plenty of work to be had in his numerous mills and factories.

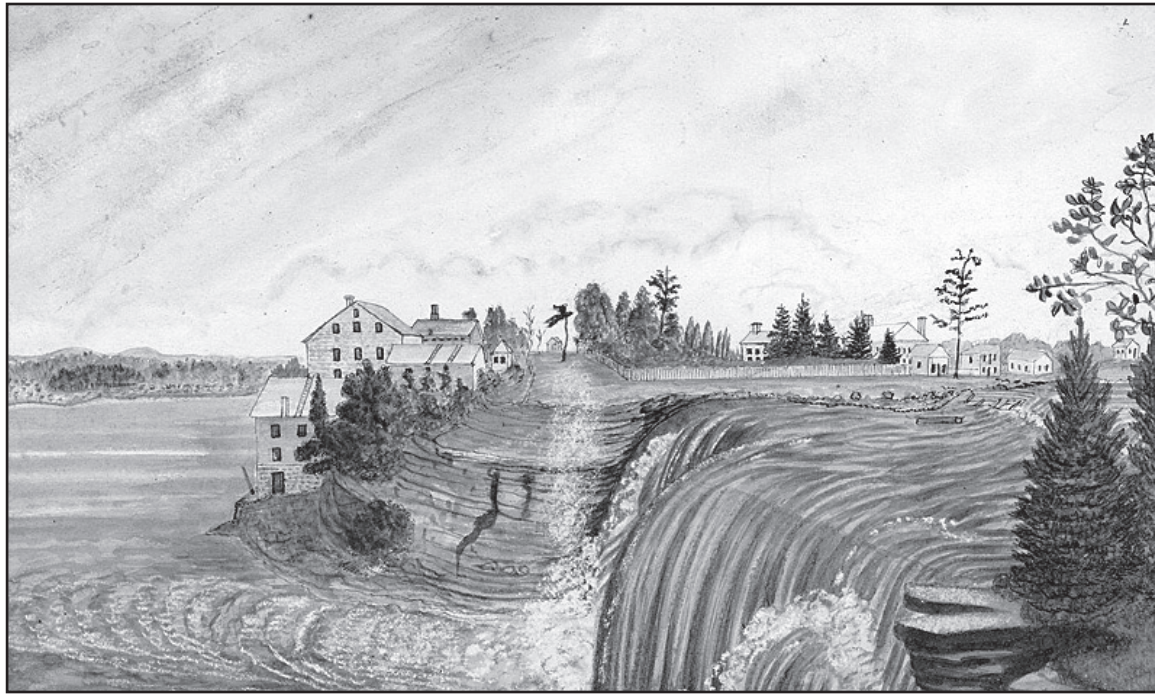
In 1838, McKay completed construction of his splendid new mansion, Rideau Hall, which added some prestige to the neighbourhood. He died in 1855, and when Ottawa was chosen in 1857 as the capital of Canada, the government leased and then purchased Rideau Hall as the official residence of the Governor General. The Vice-Regal presence provided a further boost to New Edinburgh, which saw more houses and services being built for the gentry.

The Village of New Edinburgh was formally incorporated in 1866. Twenty-one years later, in 1887, it merged with the City of Ottawa.

History? What History?

The New Edinburgh we see today is generally regarded as an up-market neighbourhood of fine houses and gardens, quaint lanes and large areas of parkland, and enjoying a pretty setting by the Rideau River. This is a far cry from New Edinburgh's origins as an industrial centre. Many of the early residents were mill workers who lived in modest homes or rooming houses. They were employed in the heavily industrialized corridors along the Ottawa and Rideau Rivers, where the Rideau Falls supplied power.

Missing from this walking tour are the brewery and distillery, the saw mill, the grist mill, the flour mill and bakery, the woollen mill and cloth factory - all established by Thomas



Thomas Mackay's Mills, Distillery, etc. and part of New Edinburgh, Rideau Falls: Drawn by Captain Thomas Burrowes in 1845.

Source: Archives of Ontario

McKay. He was also instrumental in bringing the first railway into Ottawa in 1854, with the Bytown & Prescott line running along the banks of the Rideau River through to New Edinburgh's mills.

Most signs of New Edinburgh's industrial golden age have long since disappeared. The factories and mills have been demolished and cleared, to be replaced by the Embassy of France, the old Ottawa City Hall and NCC green space. The old railway bed has become a recreational trail through the parks, although the last traces of its old bridge can still be seen heading across to Lowertown.

What we still have in some number, however, are homes, churches, and schools from throughout the different phases of New Edinburgh's history. It has been estimated that the former Village of New Edinburgh (roughly Sussex to Dufferin, Stanley to MacKay) still contains 150 homes dating from the 19th century. You'll see plenty of these on the self-guided walking tour described in the following pages.

What's in a name?

The street names of New Edinburgh's old village were not chosen at random - most have a close association to

Thomas McKay and his family, or to our immediate neighbours, the Governors General of Canada.

Thomas McKay's name provides something of a puzzle. Have you noticed that the street named after him is spelled "MacKay"? And it's "MacKav" United Church.

own family. So, in addition to MacKay Street, we have streets named after four of Thomas McKay's children - John, Charles, Alexander and Thomas. "Crichton" was the maiden name of his wife, Ann. "Keefer" was the surname of his son-in-law.

Other streets have a royal connection, with (Queen) "Victoria" as well as "Stanley" and "Dufferin" named after Governors General.

The Walking Tour

We have lots of well-maintained old homes throughout New Edinburgh, and the whole area that used to form the original Village has been designated a Heritage Conservation District. We also have many award-winning infill and renovation projects involving historic buildings. Then there are the lanes, with their own unique story to tell. So much to see in the neighbourhood - so how to decide what to include in a walking tour?

For this first effort, we've decided to keep things simple. We have selected the 17 properties that have been recognized individually by the City and Province as especially deserving their heritage status. There are 11 residential buildings, 3 schools, 2 churches, one bridge. These are some

of the best examples in New Edinburgh of buildings from different eras and they are also some of the best-documented. They provide a great introduction to our local history, but no doubt you'll make your own discoveries en route.

On the accompanying pages you will find a photograph and street address for each of the heritage properties so you should have no problem identifying them. Also included is a brief description of their special features and history. Most of the buildings - but not all - will have a bronze heritage plaque that explains a bit more about them.

ON YOUR WAY: You can start wherever you like. We have listed the 17 properties in a loop, starting at the former Crichton Street Public School at 200 Crichton Street. The length of the walk connecting #1 through #16 (MacKay United Church) is an easy 2 km; it is a further 0.5km to reach #17, École St Charles, on Springfield Road. A complete circuit will take perhaps 90 minutes - but go at your own pace.

It's worth noting as well that you can repeat the walk in different seasons for a different experience. Or perhaps you'll want to cycle around the circuit with the kids.

One final note. This is an "outside" tour only, so please respect the privacy of the occupants of the heritage homes. Nevertheless, if you do happen to see them, you may wish to thank them for the effort they have invested in looking after these wonderful buildings. They are the custodians of an important part of New Edinburgh's history.

Acknowledgements

Heritage Planner **Sally Coutts**, at the City of Ottawa, provided helpful background information on many of the properties.

Special recognition goes to local photographer, **Louise Imbeault**, who has compiled a remarkable collection of photographs of New Edinburgh's heritage buildings. The photographs included in the tour guide are taken from that collection; others can be seen in an audiovisual presentation produced by Louise that can be viewed on the "Heritage" page at www.newedinburgh.ca.



Courtesy of www.érudit.org

Thomas McKay (1792-1855), from photo belonging to Miss Lily McLeod Clark of Elmwood, Ont.

Well, Thomas was born and died as a "McKay" but for whatever reason following his death, his family adopted the form "MacKay". This is why you'll see the name spelled differently in different places.

One advantage of creating your own village is that you get to name streets after your



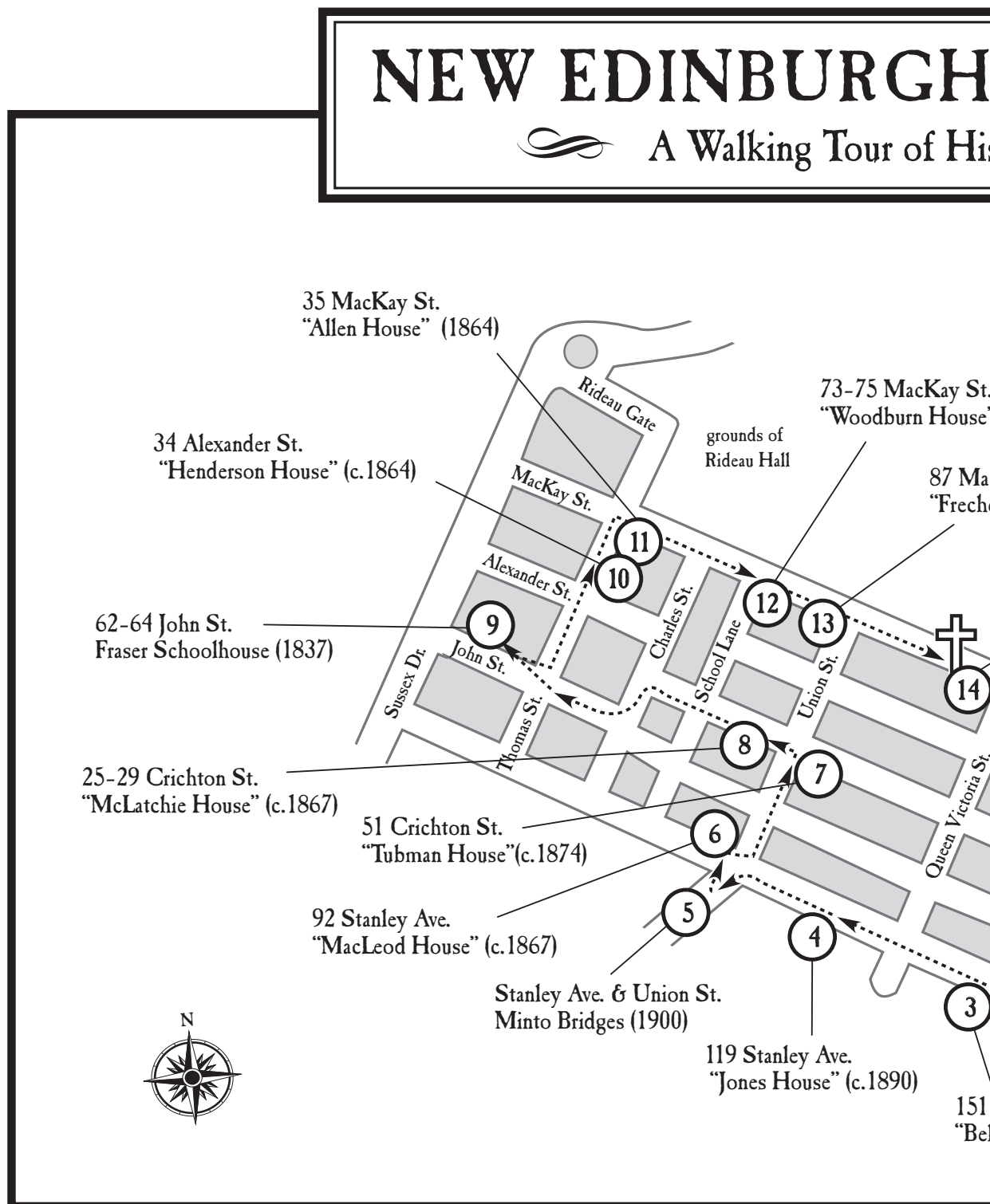
#1. 200 Crichton St. (1906) Crichton Street Public School. The school in New Edinburgh moved four times before the first school was built on this site in 1875. The present building took on its main shape in 1906. The front façade was added in 1919-20. With its modern design and facilities, it was regarded as a great advance in school architecture. The school closed in 1999. The Crichton Cultural Community Centre (aka NECTAR) was there until 2011. Today it houses the School of Dance.



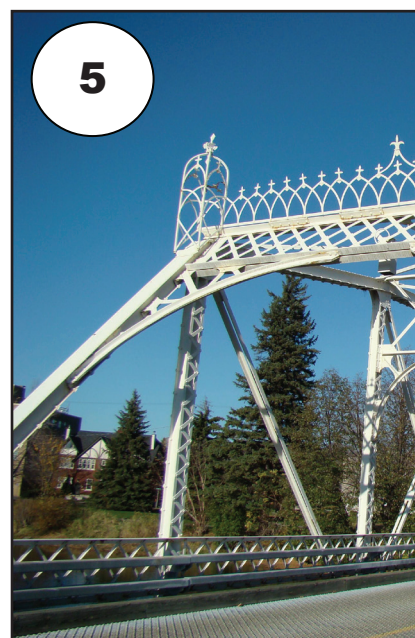
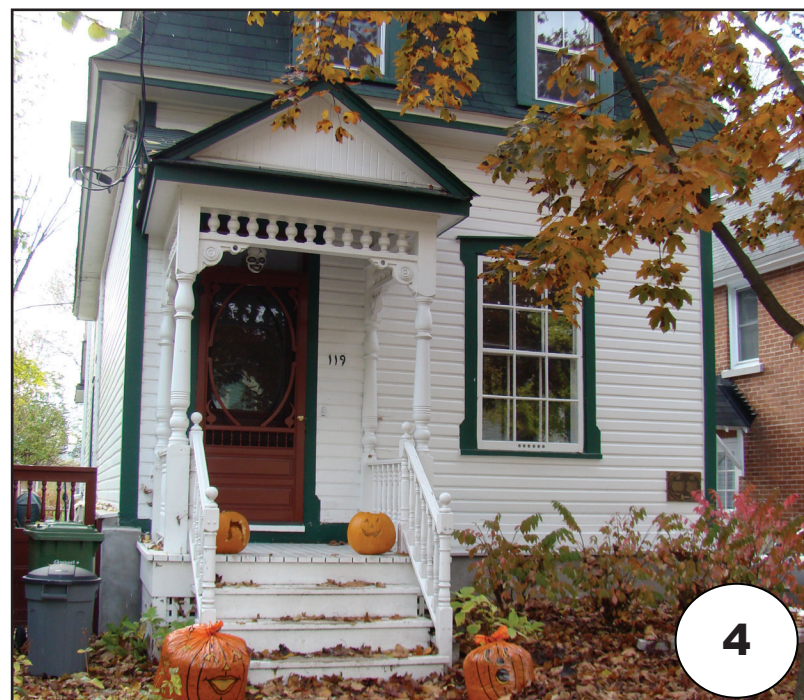
#2. 139-141 Crichton Street (1874) Garvock House. Stonemason and contractor Alexander Garvock built this small 1½ storey double house on land purchased from the MacKay Estate. With its fine masonry, it is an impressive reminder of the skills that became established in Ottawa following construction of the Rideau Canal.



#3. 151 Stanley Avenue (1868) Bell House. This New Edinburgh gem enjoys a wonderful setting. At one time, its main entrance fronted towards the Rideau River. The original 1½ storey western section of the house was built for Dr W.R. Bell as a medical office. The 2½ storey eastern section was erected in 1880 as an attached residence. The clapboard building is highlighted by its gables, large veranda, peaked-cap dormer and lots of fine detail.



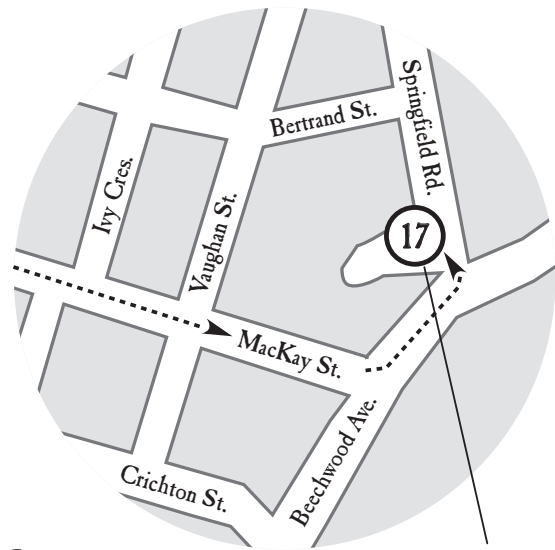
#4. 119 Stanley Avenue (c.1890) Jones House. Built for John Jones, a mill worker at the nearby mills, this house is a fine example of the modest local homes occupied by workers and their families. Impressive features include the gabled dormers, decorative porch and the Second Empire mansard styled roof (which provided more headroom upstairs but the house was still taxed only as a 1½ storey dwelling).



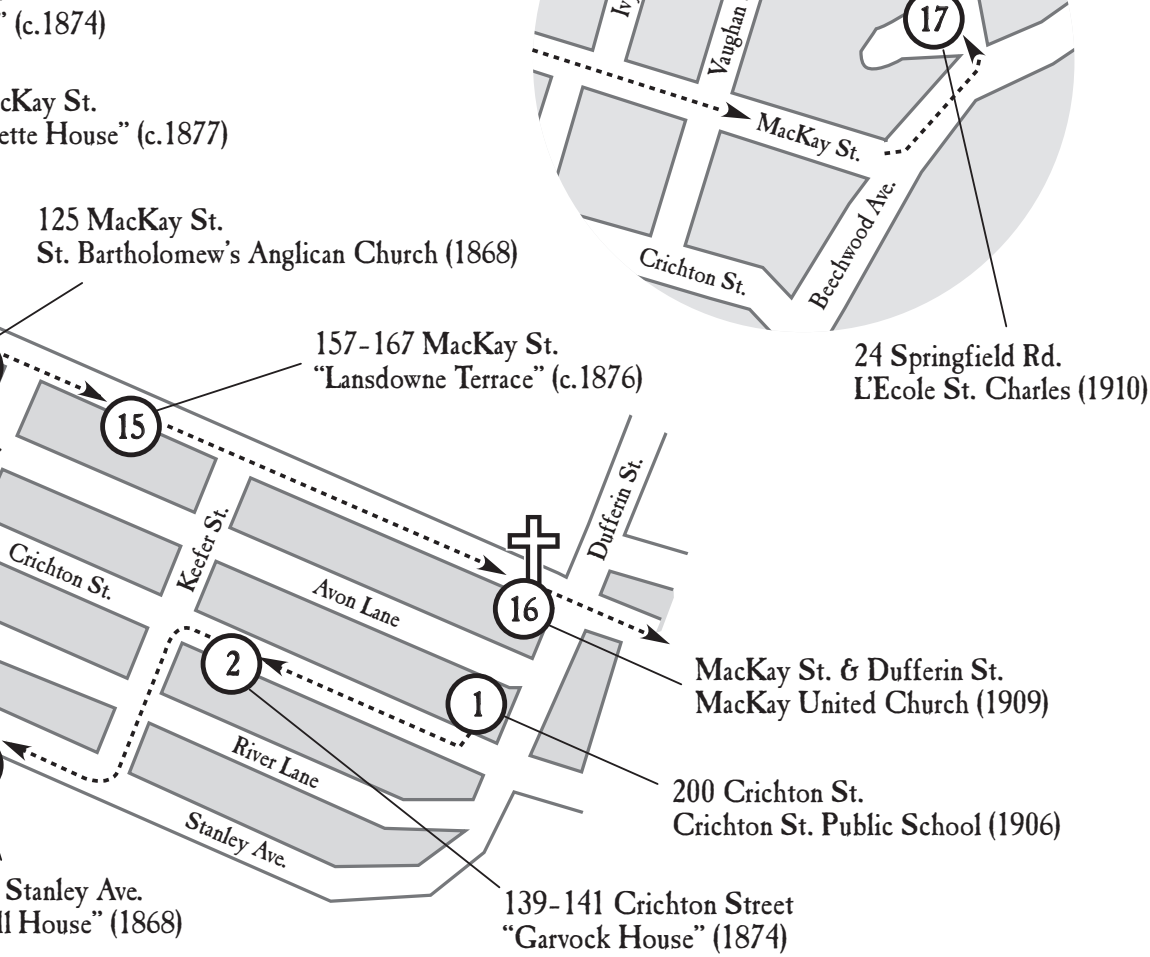
#5. Stanley Avenue at Union Street. After the Earl of Minto, eighth Duke of Atholl, these ornate bridges were originally built from Government House to Parliament Hill. They were made of lightweight steel sections and cast iron. The bridge was designed by the American Bridge Company for the "Ottawa Improvement Commission" and was completed in 1900. It was replaced by the National Capital Bridge, designed by Sir Wilfrid Laurier in 1911.

HERITAGE TRAIL

Historic New Edinburgh



#7. 51 Crichton Street (c.1874) Tubman House. The original 1 1/2 storey front section of this house was built before 1874, with the veranda being added in the 1880s. A simple, front-gabled frame structure with a steeply pitched roof, it is one of the earliest buildings from the mill village of New Edinburgh. It was owned by the Tubman family from 1874 to 1986.



#8. 25-29 Crichton Street (c.1867) McLatchie House. This is the only example of an original "board and batten" double residence remaining in New Edinburgh. The 1 1/2 storey T-shaped structure with its fancy gables was built by W.R. McLatchie as workers' housing in the early years of the village. It has survived virtually unaltered and is beautifully preserved.



(1900) Minto Bridges. Named after the Governor General of Canada, they are a nationally significant part of a ceremonial route through the city. They were built from cast iron by the Dominion Bridge Company as part of the "Improvement Commission" (a pre-1900 Commission) which was established in 1899 "to beautify the City".

#6. 92 Stanley Avenue (c.1867) MacLeod House. In a fine location, this picturesque 1 1/2 storey stone house is another excellent example of the early homes of New Edinburgh. Note its courses of rough masonry and delicate wooden porch. It was built for Dougal Macleod, who came from Scotland's Isle of Skye and worked in a local mill owned by Thomas McKay.



#9. 62-64 John Street (1837) Fraser Schoolhouse. This symmetrical stone structure is the oldest dwelling in New Edinburgh. Thomas McKay built it for the workers constructing his new home, Rideau Hall. In 1838 he converted it into a school - teacher James Fraser lived in one half and his classroom was in the other. When the school moved out a few years later, it became a double residence. The National Capital Commission acquired it in 1959.

Continued on next page.



#10. 34 Alexander (c.1864) Henderson House. This spectacular 2½ storey clapboard house is typical of the Second Empire Style and is an example of the evolving architecture of the village. The mansard roof, wishbone-shaped gables, upstairs enclosed sunporch, elaborate wood detailing, impressive front entrance and veranda all blend into an eclectic building of distinctive architectural value. It was built for John Henderson, manager of the MacLaren Lumber Mills. He became Treasurer of the Village of New Edinburgh when it was incorporated in 1866, and later became Clerk of the City of Ottawa.



#11. 35 MacKay Street (1864) Allen House. This impressive 2½ storey house on a corner lot at Thomas Street has two entrances and two fine facades of dressed stone (compare with the rougher stone at the rear and side). It was built to accommodate senior employees of Thomas McKay's mills. Note also the strong cornerstones ("quoins") and fancy wooden trim. The porches and pillars were added in the 1920s.



#12. 73-75 MacKay Street (c.1874) Woodburn House. Gentle suburban residential development comes to the growing village of New Edinburgh. This 1½ storey brick double is a delightful example of the Victorian influence on house style, with its bay windows, Gothic gables and fine trim. It was built for William Woodburn, a carpenter.

#13. 87 MacKay Street (c.1877) Fréchette House. This impressive house on its corner lot shows the influence of the Gothic Revival style of the late 1870s. Note the projecting frontispiece with its steep centre gable, coloured brickwork, and the different sizes of gable dormers. From 1881 to 1921 it was the home of the literary couple, Achille Fréchette and his wife Annie Howells.



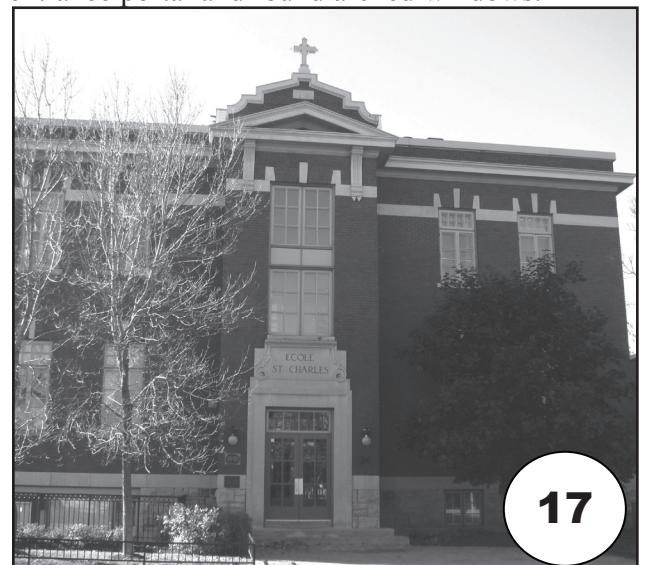
#14. 125 MacKay Street (1868) St Bartholomew's Anglican Church. This is the parish church of New Edinburgh, Lindenlea and Rockcliffe Park. Designed by Thomas Scott, St. Bart's was built on land donated by the MacKay family. This simple rectangular stone building has many associations with our neighbours, the Governors General. For example, Viscount Monck (Canada's first G-G) laid the cornerstone, Princess Louise donated the bells and the large stained-glass window over the alter was donated by Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught.



#15. 157-167 MacKay Street (c.1876) Lansdowne Terrace. This elegant brick 2½ storey terrace is Georgian-inspired. It demonstrates the transformation of New Edinburgh from a village of mill workers to an upper middle class suburb. The construction date remains a puzzle because Lord Lansdowne, after whom the terrace was named, did not become Governor General until 1883.



#16. MacKay & Dufferin (1909) MacKay United Church. The original New Edinburgh Presbyterian Church and its adjacent manse were built in 1875. It was renamed in 1901 to honour the MacKay family, long-time benefactors, and became MacKay United Church in 1925. The present church was rebuilt in 1909-10 in handsome rough-cut stone and features a corner bell tower, a three-arched entrance portal and round arched windows.



#17. 24 Springfield Road (1910) L'École St Charles School. This attractive functional structure was built of red brick set on a rock-faced foundation. Note the fine stonework, large interesting windows and lots of decorative detail. It served the francophone community of New Edinburgh until 1972 and has now been converted into loft apartments.

Further Information

Information for the article and captions accompanying the photographs came from various publications, including:

Pioneer Families of New Edinburgh (Gloucester Township) Volume One: 1830-1870, by Robert Serré. Gloucester Historical Society (2007). This book describes the geographical setting and early history of New Edinburgh and provides biographical and genealogical information on 90 pioneer families of the village.

Capital Walks: Walking Tours of Ottawa, by Katharine Fletcher. Fitzhenry & Whiteside (2003).

Ottawa: A Guide To Heritage Structures, Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee. City of Ottawa (2000).

Walking in New Edinburgh, Ottawa. Heritage Ottawa (1975?).

New Edinburgh Heritage Conservation District Study. City of Ottawa (2000).