

21 Queen St. S.E. cor. of Queen and George

Lot - 17+18 Plan- *Plan 1*

Present owner- Miss Leona Riggs

Construction - Brick

Date built- C 1855

First owner - John Bell

Map Info- 1874- shows two graperies - one along Queen east of house  
the other on the George St. Side

D.H.C.-

1860 John Bell's office was at the corner of Bridge and Pinnacle

1889 John Bell Q.C. Solicitor G.T.R. - office N.E. cor. Bridge and  
Front.

Belleville Sun 1895- John Bell was born in Ireland 72 years ago(1823)

He was the leading railway counsel in America. He died in 1905  
The G.T.R. started operation here in Oct. 27, 1856

Hastings Chronicle 1863 Aug. 5-

Mr. John Bell has added a very extensive Grapery to his eligible  
premises, covering an area of 440 ft. The supports are of iron, and  
are elliptical in form, having an altitude of 14 ft. The ground dim-  
ensions are 11 by 40 ft. It is strongly and neatly built, being  
well coupled and braced with iron and was constructed from a design  
by Mr. J. Forin -Cost \$600.

Interview- Miss Alice Lazier- John Bell was Miss Lazier's Grandfather.  
He had 7 daughters and one son He built the double house across  
Queen St. and his only son Jack lived in the corner half with his  
wife Charlotte Glass. His daughter Mrs. Andrew Thompson, manager  
of the Merchant's Bank, lived at 32 Queen Street. Her name was  
Mashilda Jane. The coach house of the Bell property is now part of  
the Bandercock property at 226 William St. There was a stream running  
through the property near which he kept a cow and his horse.  
The drawing rooms were on the west side with a door from the second  
drawing room going into the Conservatory of Grapery. On the east side  
were the Library and the kitchens. The house was divided in 1907.

Interview- Miss Leona Riggs- Her father Leo Riggs, rented the house  
in 1929 and bought it in 1936. Her Grandfather, W.B. Riggs came  
to Belleville in 1881 from Wisconsin to lead the Odd Fellows Band  
which joined with the 15th Battalion Band. He was paid \$400. a year.  
They also had a benefit concert for him at which he was guaranteed  
\$300. He taught violin although his instrument was coronet. The  
band had 3 changes of uniform and silver instruments. They played in  
Toronto Ottawa, ect. W.B. started a music store on Front St. selling  
pianos throughout the country. This would be around 1889. He switched  
to selling Ford cars in 1914, on Pinnacle St. just north of the Quinte  
Hotel. In 1922 W.B. built the garage on the west side of Pinnacle.  
He was Mayor in 1920. His son Leo made his singing debut at age of  
4, winning a silver cup. Leo had a musical career in the States,  
then came to Canada when W.B. became ill and took over the car business.

Designation Description

21 Queen Street

South-east corner of George Street

Lot A, Plan 332, a.k.a. part of Lot L, Plan 296

This red brick "Tuscan Villa" was built by John Bell, c. 1857. John Bell, Q.C., was a prominent citizen and solicitor for the Grand Trunk Railway. Members of the Bell family sold the property in 1936 to Mr. Leo B. Riggs.

The original house included 25 Queen Street, and is a fine example of the eclectic "Picturesque" style of architecture, which included many elements and was made popular through architects' pattern books available in Canada by the 1840's.

The Italianate Tower is over the entrance, but is off-centre to the plan of the whole building. The Italianate is also emphasized in the round-headed windows on three sides of the tower, the round-headed entrance and west side doorways, and the scrolled brackets to the eaves all around.

The original 12-pane windows have flat arches of brick and were originally shuttered. The oriel window over the entrance was a later change. The front and west side verandahs were installed probably in the 1890's, with the verandah posts and fretted brackets of the late Victorian fashion. About 1890 a portico was erected over the front entrance, with Classical details including a bracketed pediment, and a handsome doorcase with side pilasters and a round arched fanlight of red stained glass.

The house was divided into two dwellings in 1907, and a two-storey brick wing added to the rear of the west block, now 21 Queen Street. Interior changes were made at this time and subsequently.

The block-wide original lot contained shrubbery and trees placed to enhance the "picturesque" effect, a prospect still delightful today.

Full Description Information for  
Designation of 21 Queen Street. Lot A Plan 332  
a.k.a Lot L Plan 296

Site: Is on the southwest corner of Queen St. and George St., originally lots 17 and 18 George St. (Registry Office Abstract Book no. 48) His property originally also included lots 14 to 18, William St. Thus the property stretched a full block between George and William Streets. At the rear lot 16 William Street he built a two storey coach house, still standing.

Plan The house was built in the irregular shape of the Picturesque style then in vogue, with varying rooflines, and composition in asymmetrical balance. The "Picturesque villa" had already been introduced regionally in the early 1840's with the building of Bellevue House ("The Caddy Castle") in Kingston. The Bell house was developed from roughly an L shape, with verandahs at the rear and along western exposures (Goad Insurance Map, 1878 & 1883) Two greenhouses, or "graperies" are shown on the map, one on Queen St. near William St., and one at the rear of the west wing off the side verandah. An early tin type of the Queen St. facade shows carved balconies under the tower windows and a flat arched window over the entrance, replaced some time later by an oriel window. Numerous additions of one and two storeys were added by 1900 (Goad map 1888-1900) A six foot brick wall enclosed the front greenhouse and ran back to the front corner of the east wing. The house was divided into two dwellings in 1907 after Mr. Bell's death in 1905. (See plan 332) At this time the outline had developed into an irregular L shape with the addition of a wing on the west side and the removal of previous additions on the east side. The verandah now ran across the front and on the west side only, of the west block, now 21 Queen St.

Interior: Important interior features: the round headed original front door, with glazing in the upper half covered by a wrought iron filigree; the wood mouldings; plaster ceiling medallions; original hall lighting fixture. now electric. 186.

Full Description - 2.

original staircase with Carved newel post and turned balusters; the fireplaces throughout the house exhibiting features from various periods and styles; the radiator grille covers of wrought iron with marble tops.

The Bell family sold the property to Leo B. Riggs in 1936. The Riggs family had lived in it as tenants since 1929. His daughter Miss Leona Riggs still makes 21 Queen St. her home.

Biography See attached: excerpt from *The Belleville Sun*. 1895  
Research by Lois Foster, c. 1977, Building Research Committee,  
Hastings County Historical Society.

Bell-Riggs House

21 Queen St.

John Bell, solicitor for the Grand Trunk Railway, which was completed through Belleville in 1856, built this home around 1855. According to an article in the Belleville Sun, Mr. Bell was the leading railway counsel for America. His office was at the corner of Bridge and Pinnacle Street. The design of the house might have been taken directly from Andrew Jackson Downing's "Designs for Cottage Residences" of 1852. Outwardly the appearance is unchanged. This is one of Belleville's finest examples of the popular Tuscan Villa with the off centre Italianate tower. The Riggs family, who lived in the home in the early 1930's, became well known in Belleville as early as 1881 when W.B. Riggs came from the U.S. to lead the Oddfellow's Band. He opened a music store on Front Street about 1888, selling pianos throughout the area, then making a big switch in 1914 to selling Ford automobiles. Mr. Bell built the double house across the street for two of his children. His son, R.J. Bell, Notary Public, lived in the corner half. His daughter, Mathilda Jane, wife of Andrew Thompson, manager of the Merchants Bank, lived at 32 Queen Street. This is an interesting example of a double house built almost 100 years ago.

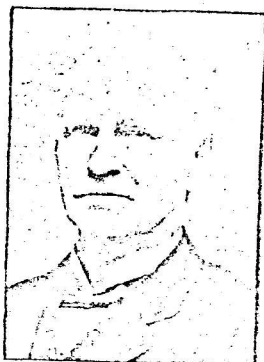
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Building No 21

May 31, 1895.

John Bell married  
Helen Maria Turnbull  
daughter of John Turnbull.  
She died in 1879 at  
age 47. They had seven  
daughters and one son.  
John Bell died in 1905.

CANADA does not number among her citizens a man of whose record she has better reason to be proud than Mr. John Bell, Q.C., solicitor for the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada, solicitor for the county of Hastings, and solicitor for the local



MR. JOHN BELL, Q.C.

offices of the Bank of Montreal and the Merchants' Bank of Canada, and also a member of the Benchers of the Law Society. He was born in Strabane, Tyrone, Ireland, about seventy-two years ago. When a very young lad he came with his parents to New York, and eventually settled in Canada. From an early age he gave great promise as a student, and later on the bent of his in-

tellect soon received recognition in the study of law, for which he showed the greatest aptitude. He began his law studies in Kemptville, near Perth, afterwards studying in Toronto with the present Chief Justice Haggarty of the Court of Appeal, also with Hon. George Crawford, late Lieut.-Governor of Ontario. After graduating in law he came to Belleville and formed a partnership with the late Hon. John Ross, and about that time was appointed solicitor for the Grand Trunk Railway, or what was then the Grand Trunk, for the system was very much in its infancy at that period. From that day to this Mr. John Bell has virtually been the guiding hand of all the Grand Trunk corporation's legal business, and not only has he successfully coped with the company's individual business, but he has framed and assisted in the enactment of nearly all of Canada's railway laws. For years he has been recognized as the leading railway counsel in America, and, in fact, it has been claimed that few in England, the cradle of railways and railway laws, can equal him in railway legal erudition. An incident occurred, which well bears out this assertion, while in England on one of his trips in the interests of the railway, when a supposed hypothetical knotty problem involving some very nice points in railway law and subtle reasoning, was submitted to him for his opinion, with which several distinguished English counsel differed, however. It subsequently proved that the supposed hypothetical question was a real one and it was decided by a bench of British judges in accordance with the opinion expressed months before by the colonial lawyer. Scarcely a better example of Mr. Bell's acumen and thorough knowledge of railway law could be conceived than this. What wonder that a man who could thus distinguish himself is admitted to stand in the front rank of the bar of not only this country but America as well. Mr. Bell has a military record, having been a major in the Toronto Grand Trunk Artillery Brigade and went to the front at the time of the famous Fenian raid. He still retains his rank. Although Mr. Bell is essentially a public man, yet he loves his home and enjoys nothing more than the companionship of his family around his own fireside. He is a member of St. Andrew's church, in which he is known as one of its most liberal supporters. In a word he is a man of whom Canada is proud, whose services have been of inestimable value to the land he lives in, and the company he has for so many years represented, being withal a plain, genial gentleman in conversation, and one who never advises useless litigation, preferring to settle a case when the principle is not sacrificed.