

# Old Houses of the Quinte Area

By Viva Richmond Graham

Editor's note: The author, who is well known in the city for her cultural interests, has lived here for eleven years, having previously resided in Ogden, Utah. One of her main hobbies is old homes and their history and in the pursuit of this interest she has visited some of the more distinctive ones not only in the immediate district but in Kingston in the east and to Coborne in the west. On the request of the editor, Mrs. Graham has written a short series dealing with the more interesting of the houses she has visited. One of the things which made her task so pleasant was the gracious welcome which was extended to her by all owners of the homes she visited. The editor acknowledges with gratitude the wonderful co-operation and hospitality which were given so freely. Pictures of many of the houses will illustrate the articles.

On Dundas Street, in our city, stands a compact, rectangular, gray-stone house. It plays well the role of a gracious, sedate, private residence, with scant heed to the whistle and roar of a train which passes, a block or so away, on ribbon, silver-polished tracks of the railroad — the successor of its vanquished master, the Stage Coach.

For, allegedly, this house originally served as the Stage Coach Toll House. Long was it accustomed to the clatter of horses' feet and the roll of carriage wheels that thundered to a stop before its door, where the stage driver swung down from his seat with all the authority of a ship's captain. In fact, since the first means of travel was by boat, travel was associated with boats. The driver was called Captain and he had to pay the toll, to gather mail, to help the women passengers in or out of the "cabin" the coach's interior, while some member of the crew, any coach employee, would pile on or take off the baggage — 20 to 23 pounds per person — on deck, which was the top of the coach itself.

"In those early days," writes

Mr. W. C. Mikel in his History of Belleville, "the roads were rough with numerous swamps and mud holes to navigate, streams to cross and rugged hills to climb. The ordinary time for a trip from Toronto to Montreal at some seasons of the year took from five to six days." He mentions, too, that William Weller, who had the reputation of being the best driver in the Province, (it was he who drove Lord Sydenham from York to Montreal, in twenty minutes less than the thirty-six hours to be in time to stop a hanging of an innocent man, way back in 1840; "no one but Weller could have done this"), also knew "every inch of the road from Detroit to Montreal," and resided "in the Bay of Quinte District". Weller became one of the largest stage proprietors, and kept numerous stables of horses all along his routes, at short intervals, in readiness for quick changes for fresh horses.

## ANTEDED SERVICE

Even Fancy's highest flight little dreamed that such knights of the road, whose "horse-powered" coaches swept past farm house to own house with mail and passengers were fore-runners of the postal service, the telephone, the telegraph, radio, TV, not to mention the railroad, which would absorb each as the early brakeman, conductor, ticketman or depot master, even it is said, an owner.

In turn, such men became the new knights of the road. Nor did adventure ever ride more handsome and daring than when three of these men bore a dream to reality in the culmination of a trans-Canada railway.

Somewhat, the romance and excitement evades Fate's accurate, bony finger as it traces the modes and changes of Canadian travel, so that "these three" — Van Horne, Lord Mount Stephen and Lord Strathcona remain merely names between covers of dust-gathering history text-books for many pupils.

Being such a pupil, is why it is something of a breath-taking adventure in itself, to walk along a street in Montreal and hear someone say: "Look — that's the Van Horne residence!" or "Oh — the large mansion you see over there was built by Lord Mount Stephen!" It is a thrill to have a friend here in town say: "I well remember meeting Lord Strathcona, as a child when travelling with my parents, who knew him very well. We were house-guests at his home, near London, when we were visiting England . . ."

To meet and talk with people who knew these men personally, suddenly brought them into focus, and they became life size in stature, mentally, physically, morally; human beings, warm, stout-hearted with tremendous creative ability that was stimulated by challenge and whose vision wore belief, faith, hope and wrought opportunity out of the insecurity of their time.

## SAVED BY A LOAN

"Ah, yes," affirmed a former historian of the C.P.R., the late Dr. Murray Gibbon, "there were many times, when it was not

lighted at night. It was painted by none other than Mr. Van Horne himself.

"As a matter of fact, Dr. Gibbon recalled, "Van Horne painted a great deal. One time I was invited to have lunch with him. This was an honor, indeed, in those days! Upon leaving, I mentioned my interest in seeing more of his pictures. He said to me: 'Come again and if I'm not home, the butler will show you around.'

"It so happened, I did go back sometime later. The butler showed me around. We stopped before one picture and I said: 'But this isn't a real master-piece!'

"The butler looked at me. He said: 'Mr. Van Horne painted it himself, it's a copy. He calls it his trick picture, and keeps it to see who are the critics they claim they are!'

Sincerity, evidently meant a great deal to this man, for Dr. Gibbon spoke of another time, when he was invited to have dinner at the Van Horne home. "Afterwards," he said, "a servant passed cigars around in a humidor that contained the five-cent brand of cigars, named after Van Horne. If anyone made a great fuss over these, Van Horne immediately considered that person insincere."

"When Mr. Van Horne died on January 2, 1916, my husband wrote a poem dedicated to him and which is published in my husband's volume of poetry," said Mrs. Lighthall. "Edda, Mr. Van Horne's only daughter, loved her father's paintings so much that, after his death, she opened the library and drawing room on certain days to the public. Later, she became completely blind. Yet, so well did she know each painting she personally could conduct the visitors around."

## GREAT LOVE FOR ART

It would seem that Mr. Van Horne's personal love for art was not only fulfilled, but brought pleasure to his city at large. His interest was inherent, and real and he was fortunate in this. For the majority, this had to be acquired, because as Dr. Gibbon explained: "The eighties and nineties were stimulating years in Montreal. The thing to do, at that time, in order to make a show of culture, was to own paintings."

"There was a certain London dealer, a Dutchman by the name of Van Vieseling, who was instrumental in sending many pictures of the Barbizon School to Canada. Pictures were duty free from England to Canada. Also from Canada to United States. So Montreal became an art centre and clearing house.

"Mr. Van Horne told us he had always had an unquenchable thirst for knowledge, even back in the days of early youth, when he lived in Iowa" said a close friend. "He was very poor and one day a boyhood chum lent him a book on fossils. He craved to possess its contents, so proceeded to copy the whole book; drawings and all, in the loft of the barn, by candlelight on any paper he could find. The borrowed book, held in place by a piece of an old lead-pipe became so well-thumbed and marked, it was practically in tatters when finally returned to its owner.

## NOTED COLLECTOR

"We often visited their home, my husband and I," the friend went on, "I recall the conservatory where Mrs. Van Horne kept a noted collection of rare orchids. The adjoining hall hung with priceless rugs led into a large vaulted, carved Gothic Library filled with Chinese objects d'art. Mr. Van Horne had a magnificent collection of Chinese porcelain, of which he made an illustrated index. He illustrated each piece by a copy of his own drawing in color. Imagine doing such painstaking work!

"He owned some fine masterpieces and the drawing-room was filled with paintings. But in the dining-room which was furnished with massive mahogany furniture, hung a painting of a railroad yard

(To be continued next Saturday)