



Now changed almost beyond recognition, this once lovely house was the home in the 1840's of Dr. and Mrs. G. N. Ridley and their family of six sons and two daughters, one of whom married the Baron de Rottenburg. The house,

when first built well over a hundred years ago, commanded a regal view of lawn and bay's blue water. The pioneers would not allow Dr. Ridley to give up medicine to be a gentleman farmer, upon his arrival from England. (Photo by Howard Graham.)

Old Houses of the Quinte Area

By Viva Richmond Graham

THE RIDLEY HOUSE

Some old houses stare unseeingly, at the passing present with gaping, bleak windows - - like a mutilated thing - - mute, inarticulate. As if a wicked fairy, resentful of having been excluded from the inner circle of gay, warm, loving life, it once sheltered, had cast a traditional spell over it, in its desolation - - of silence.

There stands such a house, in Belleville, down along South Front Street, across the street from the harbor. When first built some hundred years ago, it commanded a regal view of lawn, the bay's blue water, with a forest beyond. Though an industry is lodged therein now, bits of its original self show through. The upstairs portion hasn't been used much. Some of the windows are the original 24 paned ones. One window still has the original shutters—with no bar in the centre. Original doors; a newel post; windows and walls, which a doctor's family once knew so well. A family of eight children, two of whom were daughters, one, whose little daughter's tombstone in the churchyard of St. Thomas' Church, reads:

"Here rest the remains of Caroline Louisa Frances, daughter of the Baron de Rottenburg and Louisa Mary Ridley, his wife, who departed this life, August 3, 1840, aged three months and sixteen days."

This tombstone lies not far from another tombstone, of the grandfather, which reads:

"George Neville Ridley, M. R. C. S., London, England, died 1857, aged 62."

Who was this doctor? How did he happen to come to Belleville. What was the romance between his daughter and a Baron—a century ago?

A bit of research has disclosed, back in the days when the average life time of Englishmen was thirty-five years, and doctors gave as a dose of medicine to the King, to relieve a fever (they hoped!): gold dust, powdered pearl-dust, dust of human skulls, several ounces of baby's tears, as the ingredients, there was born on February 22, 1794, at Kimbolton in Devonshire, England, One, George Neville Ridley.

The Ridleys were a family of physicians. It seemed only natural that young George should follow his father's footsteps and studied at St. Thomas and Guy Hospital. He was a pupil under the eminent doctor of those days, Sir Ashley Cooper. George had a knack, they said of being able to diagnose most accurately, which was quite amazing.

While in the middle of his course, George decided to visit Canada on a lark. He felt the need to "get away from it all," and so landed in Quebec where he had family friends. Indeed, he seemed to have friends and letters of introduction all along the way. He proceeded to

Montreal where he met and visited Les Mesuriers, The Mofats. On to Kingston he stayed with Dr. Sampson; at Cobourg, visited the Boultons and in Toronto saw the Robinsons. This was in the year of 1818.

Upon his return to London, he finished his medical course, received his degree of M.R.C.S. and married. He and his brother-in-law decided to form a partnership and practise at St. Albans. But unfortunately, due to jealousy on the part of the brother-in-law, this partnership dissolved. To relieve his disappointment, George remembering the Canadian trip of six years before determined to settle in Canada, give up medicine and become a gentleman farmer! From a grandson of Dr. Ridley comes the information that he not only did so, but bought a farm of 140 acres near Belleville for a dozen silver knives and forks.

But, as can be imagined, he didn't farm long! News soon spread that he was a doctor, and the demands on his time were many and great. Sometimes in order to reach his patients he had to travel through forests. When this was the case he would drive in a cart as far as he dared then unhitch his horse, put on "the grasshopper" as he called his saddle, and ride horseback the rest of the way. Or if the patient lived more in open land, he would sometimes take his son with him for company and make good use of the time quizzing the youngster on medical questions. Needless to say, the boy followed in his father's calling.

In the meantime George bought land and a house in Belleville, as mentioned above. He led an active, useful life. In 1838 he became a member of the Upper Canada Medical Board and later was one of a board of four to form a board of education for the District of Victoria. And he was a Tory.

The house was lively with a family of six boys and two daughters. Bessie never married, but Louisa met and fell in love with a young military officer, a son of General de Rottenburg, who was president of the Council of Upper Canada from June 19th to Dec. 18, 1813. Young Rottenburg was born at Kingston in 1807, and his military career led him to take part

in the rebellion of 1837-38 when he became a Major. Later he became Adjutant General of the Militia. When the 100th Prince of Wales Regiment was raised in 1858, Rottenburg was offered the command. He took the regiment to England and then off to foreign service to Gibraltar. In 1861 he gave up his commission and retired from the army, and became a Military Knight of Windsor.

As for George Ridley, like so many doctors who serve others with no thought of self, he became very ill in prime of his career, at the age of forty-eight. He had diabetes. In the course of three months his weight of 225 pounds melted away to a shadow of his former self. He never fully recovered from these attacks, when he died at the age of 62 years.

So the old house, forgotten though it may be, stirs with many memories of the family named Ridley, a name which is still well known in the city. A descendant, also lives in Banff, owner of a large gift shop there, and the name given by another relative is proudly possessed by a college in an Ontario city.

Next Saturday Mrs. Graham will write about octagonal houses.