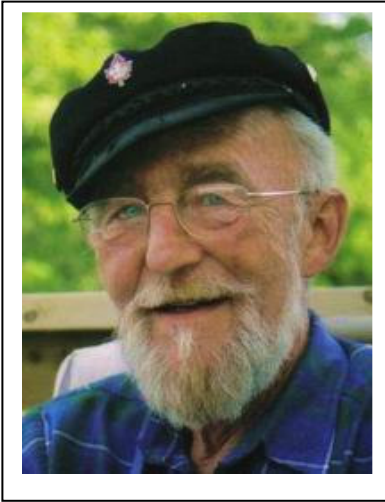


The Family Historian

Patrick Wohler

Column #23

True Confessions



A very important quality for a researcher is the ability to maintain focus while sifting through reams of otherwise fascinating but unrelated material. I try to help myself by keeping a research record sheet beside me to remind me why I am there. It usually works for me and allows me to note unrelated things that I might want to follow up later.

I am a very curious person and my range of interests is constantly expanding so I have to really work hard at this focus business. Recently while going through some early Assessment Rolls for Almonte, the name of James H. Wylie appeared and little bells started ringing. Feeling very virtuous, I made a note of it and carried on with my research.

At the first opportunity, I did a superficial check for Wylie material and was amazed at the unfolding of the story of one of the pioneer entrepreneurial families of Almonte.

The original James Wylie came from Paisley, Scotland to Perth and then on to Shepherd's Falls (now Almonte). He was a contractor

on the Rideau Canal, a mill owner, a distiller, a merchant, a farmer, a Ramsay Township Treasurer, a magistrate, and a member of the Legislative Council.

He is best remembered in Almonte as the builder of Burnside, the beautiful stone Georgian mansion on Strathburn Street (AKA Hamilton Street) that Marilyn and Howard Campbell have converted to an elegant B&B but he also had a passionate interest in agriculture and ran a Model Farm at Burnside. He was instrumental in the organization of the Agricultural Society and was a strong advocate of advances in agriculture.

He was the major player in bringing electricity to Almonte; first to power his mills, then to light the lamps on Mill Street. In his diverse business enterprises he was an early example of what today's economists refer to as 'vertical integration'. He grew the crops on his farm, processed them in his mills and distillery, and marketed them to the consumers in his Dry Goods store and bar.

His oldest son, William and his son, William, became millers in their own right, first in Almonte, then in Carleton Place and another son, James H. succeeded to his father's interests in Almonte. The family also owned the great stone building at the foot of the bridge on Bridge Street with the polychrome slate roof.

What a story is waiting to be researched and told about this family—any takers?

The 'Wylie Diversion' led to another minor one on the history of the various names of Almonte, but that is for another day.

I freely confess to finding my jollies in these little sidelines of my research but I try to maintain focus when I need it and I usually do and I did say that this was supposed to be fun, didn't I.

Jewish Burials in Toronto

Reader Reva Dolgoy recently asked for assistance in locating a Jewish burial in Toronto and this can sometimes be a bit of a challenge. The records were usually kept at the congregation level and the changing demographics frequently meant that a congregation would disappear.

If you are willing to play the bureaucratic game, of course, and have enough information, you can apply to the Provincial Registrar General or Archives depending on the date of the interment (before or after 1929).

Taking an optimistic point of view (and researchers must be optimistic), a good place to start is with the Jewish Genealogical Society of Toronto. Their web site is at: www.jgstoronto.ca/ and if you select <Resources> and then <Toronto Cemeteries> you will be presented with a list of Toronto Jewish cemeteries.

Clicking on a cemetery will provide contact information and sometimes their website. Some of them even have a list of interments.

If this is not successful, there is a link for the Jewish Archives in Toronto and they may well be able to help, especially for congregations that no longer exist.