

THE BEECHWOOD^{WAY} MAGAZINE



Bytown at 200: The
People Who Built a
City

 BEECHWOOD

Beechwood

In 1826, a construction camp at the junction of the Rideau and Ottawa Rivers began calling itself Bytown. What followed over the next two centuries was not inevitable. It was built, deliberately, imperfectly, and often under strain, by people who arrived from elsewhere and chose to stay. As we mark the Bytown Bicentennial, this biography series is about returning the city to its human scale.

Ottawa did not emerge fully formed as a capital. It grew from a military works project into a lumber town, from a contested settlement into a municipality, and from a provincial compromise into the seat of a nation. That transformation depended on surveyors and stonemasons, doctors and clergy, soldiers and civil servants, merchants, engineers, artists, journalists, and civic reformers. Many are now reduced to street names, footnotes, or forgotten plots of land. Their stories deserve more.

This e-book brings forward the lives of individuals buried at Beechwood Cemetery whose work shaped Bytown's foundations. These are not mythic founders. They are builders, people who laid stone, enforced law, healed the sick, organized militia units, ran mills, wrote bylaws, chronicled events, and argued fiercely about what this place should become.

You will meet:

- Engineers who carved the Rideau Canal through wilderness and kept it functioning long after its military purpose faded.
- Lumbermen and industrialists who turned rivers into supply chains and settlements into towns.
- Clergy and physicians who confronted epidemic, poverty, and disorder when institutions were thin and risk was personal.
- Civic officials, poets, artists, and historians who gave Bytown its language, memory, and identity.
- Women whose curatorial, cultural, and intellectual labour ensured that early Ottawa did not forget itself.

These biographies are not hagiographies. Many of these figures were controversial. Some held views that did not age well. Others failed publicly or privately.

That complexity matters. Bytown was forged through disagreement as much as consensus, and maturity came slowly.

What unites these stories is commitment, to place, to service, to building something that would last beyond individual lifetimes.

Beechwood is the natural anchor for this series. As Ottawa's national cemetery, it is both an archive and a mirror.

The lives commemorated here trace the arc of the city itself: early hardship, rapid growth, civic ambition, and national responsibility. Walking its grounds is to walk through Bytown's long aftermath.

Over the coming months, this series will publish individual biographies drawn from careful research and primary sources. Each post stands on its own. Together, they form a collective portrait of a city becoming itself.

The Bytown Bicentennial is not simply an anniversary. It is a moment to re-examine origins, acknowledge labour, and recognize that Ottawa's future credibility rests on how well it understands its past.



John Rochester (1822-1894) - Section 50, Lot 1

Born on May 22, 1822, in Rouse's Point, New York, John Rochester occupies a distinctive place in the early civic and economic story of Bytown, the rough, ambitious settlement that would become Ottawa. Often cited as one of the 27 American founders of Bytown, Rochester arrived in the village in 1833, bringing with him not just his family but an entrepreneurial mindset well suited to a frontier town defined by military demand, construction, and growth.

Rochester's early success came through provisioning. Bytown was expanding rapidly in the 1830s, driven by the Rideau Canal and a constant military presence. Rochester capitalized on this demand, supplying bread, beer, and butchered meat to the garrison and surrounding workforce. His appointment on May 17, 1837, as inspector of pork and beef formalized a role he was already playing in the town's food economy, one that linked private enterprise with public trust.



By the mid-19th century, Rochester's ambitions expanded beyond supply into industry. In 1856, he and his brother James established what is generally recognized as Ottawa's first brewery, reinforcing the shift from subsistence commerce to organized manufacturing. This move placed Rochester squarely within the emerging industrial class that would reshape Bytown into a regional hub.

The lumber trade soon became his primary focus. Recognizing the economic power of the Ottawa River system, Rochester built two large steam-powered mills at the Chaudière Falls, a strategic industrial site that attracted some of the most influential lumber barons of the era. These mills operated until his retirement in 1885 and tied his fortunes to the forests, rivers, and labour networks that defined the Ottawa Valley. His influence extended further when he launched his youngest son, George, into the lumber trade, founding the community of Burnstown.



Rochester was not only a businessman but a city-builder. Through extensive land purchases west of Ottawa's early core, he created the village of Rochesterville, a suburb that the Ottawa annexed in 1887, an early example of planned urban expansion beyond the original Bytown footprint.

Public service followed economic success. Rochester was elected mayor of Ottawa in 1870 and 1871, a period when the city was transitioning from lumber town to national capital. He also played a key role in organizing, constructing, and equipping the Ottawa Ladies' College, reflecting a broader Victorian commitment to institutional growth and education. From 1872 to 1884, he served as a Member of Parliament for Carleton County, extending his influence from municipal to national affairs.

John Rochester died on September 19, 1894, six years before the Great Fire of 1900 destroyed much of what he had built, including his mills and residence. His burial at Beechwood Cemetery places him among the builders, politicians, and entrepreneurs who shaped Ottawa's formative decades.

Alonzo Wright (1825-1894) Section 48, Lot 29



Born on February 26, 1825, in Wright's Town, today's Hull, Quebec, Alonzo Wright was born into one of the most influential families in the Ottawa-Gatineau region. He was the grandson of Philemon Wright, the patriarch whose early settlement and timber operations laid the foundations for permanent European settlement north of the Ottawa River.

If Bytown grew because of the canal and the military, Wright's Town grew because of timber, and Alonzo Wright inherited both the opportunity and the responsibility that came with that legacy. Wright entered the lumber trade on the east side of the Gatineau River, near Farmer's Rapids, managing extensive lands passed down from his father, Tiberius Wright.

These holdings placed him at the heart of one of British North America's most powerful resource economies.

By the mid-19th century, timber from the Gatineau Valley was feeding imperial shipyards, construction booms, and international markets. Wright was not simply participating in this economy, he was helping to direct it. His marriage in 1848 to Mary Sparks further consolidated his position within the region's elite networks. Mary was the elder daughter of Nicholas Sparks, one of Bytown's principal landowners and a central figure in the settlement's early development.

This union symbolically and practically linked the founding families of Wright's Town and Bytown, reinforcing the interdependence of the two communities long before Ottawa emerged as a national capital.

Wright's influence extended well beyond commerce. In 1863, he was elected to the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada as the representative for Ottawa County. His tenure coincided with a period of intense political transformation, as debates over governance, representation, and union reshaped British North America. He retained his seat until Confederation in 1867, positioning him as both a witness to and participant in the transition from colony to country.

Following Confederation, Wright continued to dominate public life in the Gatineau region. From 1867 until 1891, he was widely, and affectionately, known as "*the King of the Gatineau*." The title reflected more than popularity; it acknowledged his economic reach, political authority, and personal influence across the Ottawa Valley and throughout the Dominion. At a time when industrial capital and political power were deeply intertwined, Wright embodied both.



Alonzo Wright died on January 7, 1894, closing a chapter that spanned settlement, industrial expansion, and nation-building. His burial at Beechwood Cemetery situates him among the architects of the Ottawa-Gatineau region, individuals whose decisions shaped landscapes, economies, and institutions on both sides of the river.

Philip Nairn Thompson (1817-1887) - Section 34, Lot 14

Born in 1817 in Newcastle-on-Tyne, England, Philip Nairn Thompson emerged as one of the early industrial entrepreneurs who helped shift Bytown from a frontier settlement into a diversified manufacturing centre. After emigrating with his family to Champlain, New York, Thompson moved north in 1838, arriving in Bytown at a moment when opportunity favoured those prepared to invest capital, skill, and long-term vision.

Thompson entered the flour trade at a time when Bytown's economy was still overwhelmingly tied to timber and military supply. Rather than operating at the margins of that system, he expanded it. Recognizing the strategic advantages of water power and proximity to raw materials, he constructed the flour and sawmills that became known locally as the Thompson Mills. These facilities positioned him among the town's earliest industrial-scale operators.

By 1853, Thompson had built one of the most complex and integrated mill operations in the region. His sawmill alone had the capacity to process 40,000 logs, an industrial scale that reflected the rapid commercialization of the Ottawa Valley's forests. Attached to this operation were flour and oatmeal mills, a carding and cloth-dressing mill, and a woollen factory, an unusually diversified portfolio for mid-19th-century Bytown. Together, these enterprises signaled a transition from single-resource extraction toward value-added manufacturing.

Thompson operated his mills until 1860, at which point he sold them to three of the most influential industrialists of the era: Erskine Henry Bronson, Alonzo Wright MacKay, and J.R. Booth.

The transfer of the Thompson Mills to this trio underscores their strategic importance within the regional economy and confirms Thompson's role as a builder rather than merely an operator—someone who created enterprises capable of shaping the next phase of industrial growth.

Beyond manufacturing, Thompson was deeply embedded in the commercial life of the community. He served as a local director of the Bank of Commerce, reflecting the trust he commanded among Bytown's business elite.

He also held extensive timber limits on the Gatineau River, reinforcing his position at the intersection of finance, manufacturing, and natural resources.

Philip Nairn Thompson died in 1887, leaving behind a legacy rooted in infrastructure rather than politics. Unlike mayors or parliamentarians, his impact is measured in mills built, industries launched, and economic capacity created.



James Skead (1817–1884) - Section 49, Lot 11

Born on December 31, 1817, near Moresby in Cumbria, England, James Skead belongs to the first generation of industrial leaders who transformed Bytown from a frontier settlement into an interconnected economic centre. Educated in England, Skead emigrated to Lower Canada in 1829 with his widowed father and two brothers. By 1832, the family had settled in Bytown, positioning themselves at the edge of one of British North America's fastest-growing resource economies.

In 1838, the Skead family opened a sleigh, wagon, and cart manufacturing business near the Chaudière Falls, supplying the transportation needs of a town dependent on timber, construction, and seasonal movement. This early venture reflected a practical understanding of Bytown's infrastructure needs and provided Skead with the technical and managerial experience that would underpin his later success.



Skead entered the lumber trade in 1842, establishing operations along the Madawaska River. His business expanded rapidly, and in 1844 he became a founding member of the Madawaska River Improvement Company, an alliance of major Bytown lumber producers dedicated to improving river navigation and log transport. His expertise in constructing timber slides soon earned wider recognition, leading to his being contracted to build a slide on the Ottawa River at Bytown, a critical piece of infrastructure for the region's timber economy.

From these beginnings, Skead's lumber interests expanded to forests along the Mississippi River, reinforcing his position as one of the Ottawa Valley's most technically adept and geographically diversified operators. His work illustrates how engineering, capital, and coordination—rather than brute extraction alone, came to define mid-19th-century lumbering.

Public life followed commercial success. Skead was elected to Ottawa City Council in 1861 and, a year later, to the Legislative Council of the Province of Canada representing the Rideau Division. At Confederation in 1867, he was appointed to the Senate of Canada, extending his influence from municipal and provincial affairs to the national stage.

In 1871, Skead constructed a large steam-powered sawmill on the Ottawa River at Kitchissippi Lookout. The industrial community that grew around this mill became known as Skead's Mills—today the Ottawa neighbourhood of Westboro, a direct example of how private enterprise shaped Ottawa's urban geography.

Skead's interests were notably broad. He helped promote the Upper Ottawa Steamboat Company, later serving as its president, and invested heavily in rail transportation, including roles as vice-president of the Canada Central Railway and the Montreal and City of Ottawa Junction Railway. He also served as president of the Ottawa Agricultural Insurance Company, the Ontario Fruit Growers' Association, the Ottawa Board of Trade, and the Dominion Board of Trade—positions that reflect the breadth of his economic and civic leadership.



Politically, Skead was deeply engaged in Conservative organization, serving as president of the Ottawa Liberal-Conservative Association and chairing the Liberal-Conservative convention held in Toronto on September 23, 1874. He also presided over the Agricultural and Arts Association of Ontario, linking industrial progress with agricultural and cultural development.

In January 1881, financial difficulties forced Skead to resign from the Senate—a reminder of the volatility inherent in 19th-century enterprise. He was recalled later that same year and served until his death. James Skead died on July 5, 1884, from complications related to a lung injury sustained in a carriage fall two years earlier. Interred at Beechwood Cemetery, Skead's legacy is written into Ottawa's rivers, railways, and neighbourhoods.



Chauncey Ward Bangs (1814–1892) - Section 50, Lot 24

Born on January 19, 1814, in Stanstead, Lower Canada, Chauncey Ward Bangs represents a different but equally critical strand of Bytown history: the rise of skilled trades, small manufacturing, and civic leadership that carried the town into maturity. Long before Ottawa defined itself through grand institutions, it depended on merchants and craftspeople who supplied daily life and built public trust through reliability and service.



Bangs began working at an early age as a hatter and furrier alongside his father, mastering a trade that combined craftsmanship with commerce. In 1847, he relocated to Bytown and established his own business at 34 Sussex Street.

Operating in one of the town's most active commercial corridors, Bangs served a growing population that included labourers, civil servants, and merchants, people whose livelihoods required durable goods suited to a northern climate. His success reflected both technical skill and an ability to adapt to the changing demands of a rapidly urbanizing settlement.

As Bytown evolved into Ottawa, Bangs transitioned naturally from commerce into public service. In 1870, he was elected alderman for Wellington Ward, a constituency shaped by working-class neighbourhoods, river commerce, and early industrial activity. His election signaled confidence in a businessman whose reputation had been built at street level rather than through inherited wealth or speculative ventures.

In 1878, Bangs was elected mayor of Ottawa, assuming office during a period when the city was balancing its lumber-town roots with its growing role as the national capital. His mayoralty reflected the values of practical governance, attention to municipal services, commercial stability, and civic order, at a time when Ottawa was consolidating its urban identity.

Bangs's interests were not confined to retail and politics. In 1867, the year of Confederation, he formed Buckingham Manufacturing and served as its president. The company was active in the lumber sector, extending Bangs's influence into the industrial economy that continued to underpin Ottawa and the surrounding regions. This dual engagement in trade and resource-based manufacturing typifies the interconnected nature of 19th-century business leadership.

Chauncey Ward Bangs died on March 21, 1892, leaving behind a career that bridged craftsmanship, commerce, industry, and civic leadership. His burial at Beechwood Cemetery situates him among the mayors, merchants, and builders who guided Ottawa through its transition from Bytown to capital city.



Edward Sands Bradley (c.1790s-1836) - Section 25, Lot 52N

Edward Sands Bradley belongs to the generation of junior officers whose military service during the War of 1812 translated into early settlement and civic presence in Bytown. Born in Kingsclear, New Brunswick, Bradley entered imperial service at a young age, reflecting a common practice of the period in which commissions were purchased for boys from military families.

In 1812, Bradley obtained a commission as an ensign in the Nova Scotia Fencibles. Muster and monthly returns confirm his presence with the regiment in 1815-1816, when it was stationed at Kingston, a key defensive post in the aftermath of the war. In mid-1816, Bradley was placed on half-pay, a status that effectively marked retirement while retaining nominal rank and pension rights.

Seeking to continue his military association, Bradley transferred in 1817 to the 99th Regiment of Foot, recently renumbered from the 100th Regiment. This unit was short-lived, disbanding in 1818, bringing Bradley's active imperial service to an end.

Like many retired officers, Bradley turned to land and enterprise. After relocating with his family to the Bytown area, he received land grants granted in recognition of his service. These holdings formed the basis of his civilian livelihood, and he operated a series of mills—ventures that aligned with the resource-driven economy emerging along the Ottawa River and its tributaries.

Bradley's military identity remained intact in civilian life. During the late 1820s, he served as a captain in the Carleton County militia, with his father holding the rank of lieutenant-colonel and his brother, Clements Bradley, serving as a lieutenant. This family participation in the militia reflects how imperial military traditions were embedded in early colonial society and local defence.

Edward Sands Bradley died on February 25, 1836, in Bytown, at a time when the settlement was still a frontier village shaped by canal construction and military oversight. He was likely first buried in the pioneer Barrack Hill cemetery, located near today's Sparks and Elgin Streets. As Ottawa expanded and burial grounds were relocated, his remains were transferred to the Sandy Hill cemetery and later re-interred at Beechwood Cemetery.



William Brown Bradley (c.1768-1850) - Section 25, Lot 52N

The life of William Brown Bradley was shaped decisively by revolution, displacement, and imperial war. Described at his death in Bytown as “not only a brave officer but a deserving settler,” Bradley represents the Loyalist-military tradition that underpinned early settlement and governance in Bytown and Carleton County.

Bradley was born in the Thirteen Colonies on Whitemarsh Island near Savannah, Georgia, during the volatile years preceding the American Revolutionary War. His parents struggled to maintain their plantation amid political upheaval while raising William, his twin brother, and a sister.

When his father—employed by the British Army Commissariat, died during the war, the family's fortunes shifted again. In 1781, his mother married John Jenkins, a lieutenant in the New Jersey Volunteers, providing the family with both stability and a renewed military connection. The end of the Revolution brought exile. Like thousands of Loyalists, the family was forced from the newly formed United States and resettled in New Brunswick, where Jenkins established a farm and estate near Fredericton. Four more children were born there, and the household rebuilt its life as pioneer settlers under the British Crown.

By 1793, fears of renewed American aggression, exacerbated by Britain's preoccupation with the Napoleonic Wars—prompted Jenkins and Bradley to join the militia of the King's New Brunswick Regiment. Bradley went on to serve in additional regiments, steadily rising through the ranks from ensign to captain in the 104th Regiment of Foot, serving alongside a half-brother in the same unit.

Captain Bradley was commanding a company of the 104th when the United States declared war on Britain in 1812 and invaded Upper Canada. In 1813, faced with the prospect of renewed American offensives, Governor-in-Chief Sir George Prevost ordered the extraordinary redeployment of the entire regiment. Six companies of the 104th, including Bradley's undertook a legendary winter march of 1,125 kilometres from Fredericton to Quebec City and onward to Kingston. Over 52 days in February and March, 554 men hauled supplies through deep snow and extreme cold, one of the most remarkable logistical feats of the War of 1812.

Although much of the regiment performed garrison duty in Kingston, Bradley's service included active combat. A contemporary obituary recorded his participation in the May 29, 1813 raid on the American shipyard at Sackets Harbor, where his company sustained casualties. He was also present at the British victory at the Battle of Beaver Dams on June 24, 1813, where nearly 1,000 American soldiers surrendered, and later at the costly assault on Fort Erie on August 15, 1814, where his unit again suffered losses.

With the defeat of Napoleon and the conclusion of the War of 1812, Britain rapidly reduced its army. The 104th Regiment was disbanded, and Capt. Bradley, then 46, retired on half-pay, settling near Montreal. By the early 1820s, the family once more migrated west, this time to the Bytown region, where Bradley received additional land grants in March and Huntley Townships and along the Rideau River.

In civilian life, Bradley's leadership remained central. He served as lieutenant-colonel of the First Carleton Militia and as a Justice of the Peace, helping administer the newly established judicial district of March and Huntley. Among settlers, he was remembered as "generous, good-hearted and obliging." Together with his sons, he operated a wool-carding mill, a shingle mill, and a mixed farm, enterprises that supported the growing local economy and reflected the transition from military to agrarian life.

William Brown Bradley died on October 2, 1850. He was initially buried in the Sandy Hill cemetery alongside his son Edward Sands Bradley, who had died in 1836. When the Sandy Hill burial grounds closed, the remains of eight Bradley family members were reinterred in 1876 at Beechwood Cemetery, ensuring the family's enduring place in Ottawa's landscape of remembrance.

John Burrows (Honey) (1789-1848) - Section 50, Lots 6 SW

A gravestone at Beechwood Cemetery bears an unusually comprehensive tribute: “Honored gentleman, civic and religious leader, Royal Engineer, and Superintendent of the Rideau Canal. Came to the wilderness of Upper Canada in 1816, from England.” Few epitaphs capture a life so fully. The man it commemorates, John Burrows, was among the most consequential yet understated builders of early Bytown.

Born near Plymouth, England, on May 1, 1789, he was christened John Burrows Honey, later adopting his mother’s surname as his own. The reasons remain speculative, though contemporaries suggested political associations in England may have made emigration, and a change of name, prudent. Trained as a civil engineer and serving in the militia, Burrows possessed a rare combination of technical skill, discipline, and artistic ability that would define his Canadian career.



Burrows first arrived in Upper Canada in 1816, settling briefly in Nepean Township along the Ottawa River, before returning to England. In 1818, he came back permanently with his wife and brother, acquiring land near the junction of the Rideau and Ottawa Rivers, then a remote wilderness poised for strategic transformation.

That transformation followed swiftly after the War of 1812, when British authorities recognized the vulnerability of relying solely on the St. Lawrence River for military transport. The solution was the Rideau Canal, a 240-kilometre military waterway linking Kingston to the Ottawa River. Built by the Royal Engineers under John By, the project required 47 locks, dams, and canals to overcome rapids and elevation changes.

Burrows was employed by the Royal Engineers as a surveyor and works overseer. His role was expansive: surveying routes, assessing water depths, identifying stone suitable for masonry and lime, and supervising timber and hydraulic works. In 1827, he joined a demanding reconnaissance expedition with officers, contractor Thomas McKay, and Clerk of Works John Mactaggart, travelling by canoe through swamps and wilderness. Burrows’ diary records days of relentless rain, exhaustion, hunger, and torment from mosquitoes, conditions that took a lasting toll on the men involved.

Burrows’ technical legacy is matched by his visual one. A gifted draftsman and watercolourist, he produced some of the earliest visual records of the Ottawa region. His drawings of the Chaudière Falls bridges (1827-1830), timber improvements, and canal works are foundational documents of Canadian engineering history. One such drawing was later reproduced in Mactaggart’s *Three Years in Canada* (1829) and Joseph Bouchette’s *The British Dominion in North America* (1831), introducing British readers to the emerging colonial capital.

Ironically, Burrows had purchased the land on which the canal locks were eventually built in 1823 but sold it before their precise location was determined. The subsequent owner, Nicholas Sparks, profited enormously, a reminder that Burrows' contributions were measured more in public service than private gain.

When the canal opened in 1832, Burrows remained with the department responsible for its operation, eventually becoming superintendent. Though eclipsed economically by the railways, the canal endured, surviving even proposals to fill it in—and today stands as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, a testament to the foresight and endurance of its builders.



Burrows' commitment to Bytown extended beyond engineering. Appointed a town councillor by Colonel By, he also served as a Justice of the Peace during the settlement's volatile early years. A devout Methodist, he personally funded the construction of Bytown's first church. When it burned, he opened his own home as a temporary chapel until a new one could be erected—an act that cemented his reputation as a civic and religious leader.

Despite declining health, John Burrows continued working for the canal until his death on July 27, 1848, in Kingston. The Packet, Bytown's newspaper, mourned him as "one of the earliest inhabitants of Bytown," noting that his funeral was open to all, a mark of broad public respect. Originally buried in Hull, his remains were reinterred at Beechwood in 1882, returning him to the community he helped build.

Moss Kent Dickinson (1822–1897) - Section 22, Lot 57

Born on June 1, 1822, in Denmark, New York, Moss Kent Dickinson exemplifies the entrepreneurial energy that transformed Bytown into a regional commercial centre and, ultimately, the capital of Canada. The son of a ship and stagecoach owner, Dickinson grew up immersed in transportation and logistics along the St. Lawrence corridor, a formative experience that would define his career. His father's vessels called at ports between Montreal and Prescott, including Dickinson's Landing, later submerged during the St. Lawrence Seaway project of the 1950s. Tragedy struck early. When Moss Kent Dickinson was ten, his father died of cholera. After attending schools in Prescott and Cornwall, the young Dickinson entered the workforce under the guidance of one of his father's business associates, gaining firsthand exposure to trade, shipping, and finance.

By 1842, at just twenty years of age, Dickinson had acquired his first steamboat and barge. He began shipping farm produce and lumber along the Rideau Canal, the Ottawa River, and the St. Lawrence River, arteries that powered the mid-19th-century economy of eastern Canada. His operations expanded rapidly. Within two decades, Dickinson commanded a fleet of eleven steamboats, fifty-five barges, and numerous tugboats, making him one of the most significant private transportation operators in the region.

Around 1850, Dickinson settled in Bytown, where he diversified his interests beyond shipping. Among his most consequential partnerships was his collaboration with Joseph Merrill Currier, a fellow industrialist and future founder of Beechwood Cemetery. Together, they constructed saw and grist mills on Long Island in the Rideau River. These mills catalyzed the creation of the village of Manotick, anchoring settlement, employment, and commerce in what had previously been a sparsely populated area.

In 1863, Dickinson became the sole owner of the Long Island mills and expanded them significantly. He added wool-carding and cloth-dressing mills, as well as workshops producing furniture, wagons, and sleighs. Under his direction, Manotick grew into a self-sustaining industrial village with a population of approximately 400 residents, a striking example of how private enterprise shaped rural development in the Ottawa Valley.

Before relocating permanently to Manotick in 1870, Dickinson was deeply engaged in civic life in Ottawa. He served as mayor from 1864 to 1866, during a pivotal period when Ottawa was consolidating its role as the capital of the Province of Canada and, soon after, of the new Dominion. His mayoralty reflected a pragmatic, business-minded approach to governance, grounded in infrastructure, trade, and growth.

Dickinson was a longtime friend of John A. Macdonald, and his political engagement extended to the federal level. In 1882, he was elected as a Member of Parliament. He chose not to contest the subsequent election and was later defeated when he returned to the political arena, marking a quieter close to his public career.

Moss Kent Dickinson died in Manotick on July 19, 1897. His burial at Beechwood Cemetery situates him among the builders of Ottawa, men whose influence is measured not only in offices held, but in waterways navigated, industries established, and communities brought into being.



Captain James Forsyth (1806–1872) - Section 29, Lot 50

Born in Aberdeen, Scotland, on June 25, 1806, James Forsyth represents the professional soldier-settler whose steady service helped anchor military continuity in early Bytown. Though little is known of his early life, Forsyth's record reflects discipline, reliability, and gradual advancement, qualities that would later earn him lasting respect in Ottawa's militia tradition. Forsyth enlisted in the Royal Regiment of Artillery on November 30, 1822, at just seventeen years of age. His civilian occupation was listed simply as labourer, underscoring the social mobility that military service could provide. He served continuously with the regiment for nearly twenty-four years, rising to the senior non-commissioned rank of Company Sergeant before his discharge on March 31, 1846.

During this period, Forsyth spent fourteen years abroad, almost eight of them in British North America, including service in Montreal in 1841. In 1837, Forsyth married Mary Macpherson in Lewisham, London. Born in England in 1812, Mary would accompany him to Canada, where the couple raised at least six children, all born during Forsyth's years of service and settlement. The family's Canadian roots were firmly established by the time Forsyth left the regular army.

By 1851, Forsyth had settled permanently in Bytown and transitioned successfully to civilian life. Census records portray a modest but stable household: a one-storey frame house, a horse, a cow, and two pigs, markers of security and self-sufficiency in a growing town. He was employed as a bailiff, a role that aligned naturally with his experience in discipline and administration.

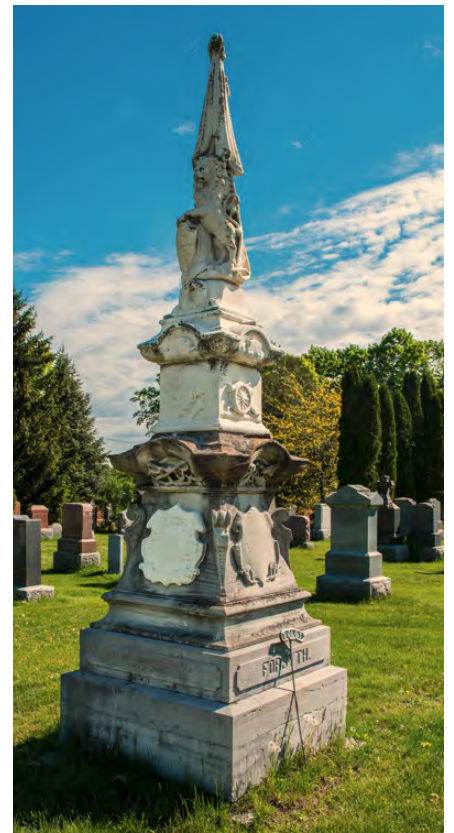
In 1855, Forsyth joined the Board of Ordnance as a clerk, returning him to the orbit of military administration just as Canada's militia system was being reorganized. That same year, the Militia Act came into force, prompting John Baillie Turner to raise a new artillery unit in Ottawa—the formation that would become the Ottawa Field Battery. Turner personally recommended Forsyth as the unit's permanent Sergeant Major, describing him as “a very respectable man.”

The appointment placed Forsyth at the operational heart of Ottawa's emerging militia. The unit was quartered in the Commissariat Building at the head of the Rideau Canal, opposite the present-day Bytown Museum. Extensive repairs were required to house roughly 100 men and 70 horses, and Forsyth played a key role in bringing order and readiness to the installation.

By the time of the Fenian Raids in 1866, Forsyth had been promoted to Captain. The Ottawa Field Battery was stationed at Cornwall, then considered under direct threat, and remained on active footing throughout the crisis.

Captain James Forsyth died in Ottawa on September 2, 1872. Like many early interments, he was first buried in the Sandy Hill cemetery before being reinterred at Beechwood Cemetery in Section 29. He rests alongside two of his sons, George and William, who predeceased him.

The Forsyth monument, erected in the 1870s and funded by members of the 2nd Ottawa Field Battery, was the first monument ever raised at Beechwood Cemetery. Its sculpted sandstone statue stands as a testament to professional respect and collective memory, commemorating a man whose quiet competence helped shape Ottawa's earliest military institutions.



Captain John Baillie Turner (c.1807–1864) - Section 29, Lot 50 NW

Born around 1807 in Devizes, Wiltshire, John Baillie Turner lived a life marked by mobility, controversy, and an unwavering commitment to military organization. His career spanning Europe, Montreal, and Bytown, culminated in the creation of Ottawa's first modern artillery unit and left a durable imprint on the capital's militia tradition.

Records of Turner's early years are sparse, but he claimed service with the Devonshire Yeomanry and later fought with a mercenary brigade during the Spanish Carlist Wars of the 1830s, experience that likely shaped his confidence in drill, discipline, and command. By about 1842, Turner had arrived in British North America, possibly serving as a veterinary surgeon with the 7th Hussars stationed at Saint-Jean, Lower Canada.

Turner soon relocated to Montreal, where his life took on a distinctly public character. He founded and briefly ran a newspaper, the *Morning Chronicle*, secured a commission in the Montreal Dragoons, and served as Deputy Grand Master of the Montreal Lodge of the Orange Order. In 1846, he was expelled from the Order amid accusations of embezzlement, charges he forcefully denied. The episode, emblematic of Turner's eventful life, did little to derail his broader ambitions.

In January 1850, Turner resigned his commission from the Montreal Dragoons in protest after the colonial government revoked the commissions of militia officers who had supported the Annexation Manifesto. Drafted in Montreal in 1849 by English-speaking Tories, the Manifesto called for the annexation of Canada by the United States following Britain's repeal of preferential colonial trade laws. Though loyal to Britain in military culture, Turner sympathized with the economic grievances that fueled the movement.

By 1852, Turner had moved to Bytown, where his professional ties to the military quickly resurfaced. As rumours of militia reform circulated in 1854, Turner seized the initiative. In December, he wrote to the Adjutant General outlining a detailed proposal for an Ottawa artillery unit—specifying manpower (94 men), equipment (nine-pounder guns), and logistics (at least 60 horses)—and asserting, with characteristic confidence, that he knew “all about the form and command of such a unit.”

A change in the Adjutant General's office required Turner to restate his case in 1855, including proposed officers—among them James Forsyth and a balanced composition of French- and English-speaking members.

On September 27, 1855, following the appointment of Roderick Matheson to command Militia District No. 1, a General Order authorized the formation of the Volunteer Militia Field Battery of Ottawa. Turner was appointed Captain.



The unit was housed in the Commissariat Building beside the Rideau Canal, today the Bytown Museum, after extensive renovations to accommodate men, horses, harness rooms, and stables. Turner's six-pounder brass guns arrived by rail from Montreal in November 1855; missing equipment followed only after his insistence.

The Battery's first live-fire test occurred on Christmas Day, 1855, near the Chaudière Falls, with targets dragged onto the frozen Ottawa River. Six of sixteen rounds struck the 450-yard targets, including two bullseyes, results Turner considered a success. His efforts were recognized in November 1856 with promotion to Major.

Turner's leadership extended beyond drill and gunnery. In 1857, he founded the Canada Military Gazette (a short-lived weekly), organized a brass band, at one point attempting to commission a music teacher to secure instruction—and ensured the Battery's prominence in civic life through outings, reviews, and annual military balls. By 1860, these events had become fixtures of Ottawa society, reinforcing the militia's public standing.

John Baillie Turner died suddenly on March 23, 1864. He was first buried in the Sandy Hill cemetery. In 1895, his remains were reinterred at Beechwood Cemetery, placed near his close collaborator James Forsyth in Section 29, reuniting the founders of Ottawa's artillery tradition in death as in service.

Hector McPhail (1789–1885) - Section 14, Lot 53

Born in Scotland in 1789, Hector McPhail belonged to the cadre of skilled craftsmen whose labour quite literally built early Bytown. Recruited to British North America for his expertise, McPhail was brought to Upper Canada to work on the stone locks and associated structures of the Rideau Canal, one of the most demanding engineering projects of the 19th century. McPhail was widely regarded as an exceptional stonemason and millwright, trades that required precision, endurance, and deep practical knowledge. Beyond the canal itself, he worked on numerous stone buildings in and around Bytown, contributing to the permanence and architectural character of a settlement transitioning from timber shanties to masonry. It is believed that his craftsmanship extended to the earliest phases of the first Parliament Buildings, linking his hand directly to the physical foundations of Canada's parliamentary presence.

On July 5, 1834, McPhail purchased 100 acres of land, where he and his wife, Mary McPhail, built a stone farmhouse modeled on the durable style of the Rideau Locks. The choice reflected both professional pride and practical wisdom, structures built to endure harsh winters and the passage of time. The farm became not only a livelihood but a homestead emblematic of pioneer resilience and self-sufficiency.

The McPhail property remained in the family for nearly four decades. On January 28, 1873, it was purchased by Joseph Merrill Currier on behalf of the Beechwood Cemetery Company, marking a pivotal moment in the creation of what would become the National Cemetery of Canada. Notably, the terms of sale reflected respect for the pioneer family: McPhail's descendants retained the right to use the log house at the southeast corner of the property for as long as his son Malcolm and Malcolm's wife lived there, a rare continuity of family presence amid institutional development.

Mary McPhail died in 1875. Hector McPhail lived to the remarkable age of 96, passing away on February 22, 1885. His lifespan bridged eras, from pre-industrial Scotland to a capital city taking shape in stone and civic order.

James Dyson Slater (1813–1876) - Section 48, Lot 1

Born on September 10, 1813, in Manchester, England, James Dyson Slater was part of the generation of professional engineers whose technical expertise underpinned the transformation of colonial Canada from frontier to functioning society. He emigrated with his parents to British North America in 1830 or 1831, settling a few miles from Niagara Falls—an environment defined by waterpower, canals, and large-scale infrastructure.

Slater trained as an engineer at a time when formal engineering education was still emerging, gaining practical experience that soon placed him at the centre of major public works. Between 1841 and 1845, he served as assistant engineer on the Welland Canal, overseeing the location and construction of the section from Port Dalhousie to Thorold. This assignment positioned him within one of the most ambitious infrastructure projects in Upper Canada, designed to overcome the Niagara Escarpment and link Lake Ontario with Lake Erie.

In 1845, Slater moved to Bytown following his appointment as assistant engineer on the Ottawa River improvement works. These projects were essential to the region's timber economy and transportation network and included the construction of dams, timber slides, bridges, and roads along the river system. Slater's work placed him at the operational heart of the Ottawa Valley, where engineering solutions directly shaped settlement, commerce, and safety.

Recognized for his technical competence, Slater was appointed a provincial land surveyor in the spring of 1849. He practised in this capacity until 1858, contributing to the orderly subdivision, valuation, and development of land during a period of rapid expansion around the emerging capital. Surveying, engineering, and administration were closely linked professions in this era, and Slater moved fluidly among them.

In 1858, Slater reached the most senior phase of his career when he was appointed superintendent of the Rideau Canal, a position he held until 1872. The canal, originally built for military defence after the War of 1812, had by then become a vital commercial and transportation artery. As superintendent, Slater was responsible for its maintenance, operation, and adaptation during a period when railways increasingly challenged the canal's economic role. His long tenure reflects both administrative skill and institutional trust.

Slater's integration into Bytown's civic and social life was reinforced in 1847 when he married Esther Sparks, the youngest daughter of Nicholas Sparks and Sarah Sparks. While this prominent family connection may explain the naming of Slater Street, his public service provides a more substantive rationale. From 1863 to 1870, Slater served as chairman of Ottawa's public school board, demonstrating a sustained commitment to education and civic improvement at a formative stage in the city's development.

James Dyson Slater died on October 24, 1876. His burial at Beechwood Cemetery places him among the engineers, administrators, and civic leaders whose largely unseen work made Ottawa viable as both a regional centre and a national capital.



John Bower Lewis (c.1810s–1874) - Section 34, Lot 8 E

Born in France in the early 19th century, John Bower Lewis arrived in British North America with his parents in 1820 and rose to become one of the most influential legal and civic figures in early Bytown. His career reflects the transformation of a frontier settlement into a self-governing city and, ultimately, the capital of a new nation.

Lewis pursued legal studies in Toronto and was called to the bar in 1839, entering the profession at a time when colonial law was still being defined in practice. Upon establishing himself in Bytown, he quickly gained a reputation for legal acuity and sound judgment. For a period, he served as solicitor for Carleton County, advising on matters of governance and administration in a rapidly growing district.

By the time of Confederation, Lewis was widely regarded as one of the ablest lawyers in the country, an assessment grounded not only in courtroom skill but in his understanding of municipal law, political process, and institutional design. Those strengths propelled him naturally into public life.

Lewis was elected councillor in Bytown's first municipal election in 1847, marking the town's formal step toward self-government. The following year, he was chosen mayor, guiding the community through its earliest experience of civic leadership. His influence deepened after Bytown was incorporated as the City of Ottawa. In 1855, Lewis was elected Ottawa's first mayor, a role he held until 1857, overseeing the city during a period of administrative consolidation and rising national prominence.

Lewis's most enduring contribution came in 1857, when the question of a permanent capital for the Province of Canada was placed before Queen Victoria. Acting on behalf of Ottawa, Lewis signed the city's formal address to the Queen on May 18, 1857, an eloquent and carefully reasoned plea that argued Ottawa's strategic location, defensibility, and symbolic neutrality between Canada East and Canada West. Later that year, the Queen selected Ottawa as the capital, securing the city's place at the centre of Canadian political life.

In 1863, Lewis took on another critical public role when he was appointed commissioner of Ottawa's police force. At a time when urban order, public safety, and institutional legitimacy were essential to a capital-in-waiting, his leadership helped professionalize civic administration and reinforce public trust.

John Bower Lewis died on November 20, 1874. His burial at Beechwood Cemetery places him among the legal architects and civic leaders who shaped Ottawa's identity before Confederation and secured its future thereafter.



Few individuals witnessed, and recorded—the full arc of Bytown’s transformation as closely or as completely as William Pittman Lett. Born in 1819, Lett arrived in British North America as an infant in 1820 with his parents, including his father, Lieutenant Andrews Lett, a veteran Irish soldier of the British Army. Over the next seventy-three years, Lett’s life would unfold in parallel with the rise of Bytown into Ottawa, the capital of the Dominion of Canada.

Educated in the classical tradition, Lett came of age amid political agitation and religious division. In his early career, he emerged as a radical journalist aligned with the Orange movement, writing forcefully on anti-Catholic themes that reflected the sectarian tensions of the era. At the same time, he was a cultural pioneer, helping to introduce organized theatre to Bytown and shaping its early intellectual life.

Lett’s trajectory shifted decisively when he entered municipal service. Appointed Ottawa’s first civic clerk, he would hold the position for an extraordinary 36 years, becoming the city’s institutional memory and administrative backbone. In this role, Lett evolved from polemicist to pragmatist. He mastered the art of moderation, wielding what contemporaries recognized as the “power of the civic pen.” As clerk, he drafted bylaws, correspondence, and formal addresses, including lobbying efforts urging Queen Victoria to designate Ottawa as the capital, an outcome he lived to see realized.

Lett was a firsthand witness to the construction of the Rideau Canal and to the physical growth of the city from Colonel By’s construction headquarters into a functioning capital. His professional life placed him at the centre of debates over infrastructure, governance, and national identity throughout the mid-19th century.

In October 1849, Lett married Maria Hinton, the 21-year-old daughter of Joseph Hinton of Hintonburgh. Their union, sealed in a Methodist chapel in Huntley after the couple eloped, initially provoked social backlash, but it proved to be a profound partnership. Together they raised nine children, enduring the era’s harsh realities, including the loss of several children to infectious disease. Marriage marked a further softening in Lett’s worldview, tempering earlier dogmatism with empathy and moral reflection.

A committed patriot and active militiaman, Lett engaged vigorously in public debate on the defining issues of his time: annexation, slavery, temperance, poverty, imperial wars, and the symbolism of a national flag. Though deeply moral and religious, a lifelong Methodist, he adapted to social change, gradually acknowledging the evolving public role of women and moderating his earlier sectarian views.

Lett’s true distinction lies in his cultural output. Through speeches, editorials, pamphlets, poetry, and civic writing, he became Ottawa’s official chronicler and de facto poet laureate. His verse and prose captured the rhythms of civic life, the drama of nation-building, and the natural beauty of the Ottawa region. A passionate naturalist, he wrote monographs on wildlife and delighted in fishing and hunting amid local forests and waterfalls.

Socially, Lett moved comfortably among the political and vice-regal elite and counted John A. Macdonald among his friends. Yet his most devastating personal moment came late in life. On September 3, 1881, Maria was killed in a railway accident near their home on Dalhousie Street, a loss that deeply marked him. Lett survived her by more than a decade.



Reverend William Durie (1804–1847) - Section 37, Lot 69

The life and death of William Durie are inseparable from one of the darkest and most defining moments in early Bytown. Born in Glasgow in 1804, Durie was educated, along with his two brothers, at the University of Edinburgh, one of Britain's foremost centres of theology and philosophy. His formation combined intellectual rigor with a strong moral conscience, qualities that would define his brief but consequential ministry in Canada. Durie was ordained in 1834 to the Relief Church at Earlston, Scotland. Founded in 1761 by Thomas Gillespie, the Relief Church rejected state control over spiritual affairs, particularly the practice of patronage in clerical appointments. This principle placed Durie squarely within a reformist tradition that valued conscience over convenience.

That conviction was tested during the great ecclesiastical rupture known as the Disruption of 1843. When the Church of Scotland refused to relinquish state influence in ministerial appointments, Durie left the Relief Church and, in 1847, joined the newly formed Free Church of Scotland, which united the Relief and United Secession Churches. The Free Church was missionary in outlook, particularly toward the colonies, and in late 1846 it appointed Durie to St Andrew's Church in Bytown.

At the age of 42, Durie arrived in Bytown in December 1846 and took up residence in the manse behind the church. He was reunited with his younger brother John Durie, who had settled in the area in 1832 and operated a successful general store in New Edinburgh. What awaited him, however, was not a settled pastoral charge but a humanitarian catastrophe.

In the summer of 1847, as many as 90,000 Irish emigrants fled the Great Famine and arrived in Canada aboard timber ships returning from Britain. The quarantine station at Grosse Île proved insufficient to halt the spread of typhus, then known as ship fever. Thousands of infected emigrants were transported onward. At Kingston, some 3,000 were packed into barges and towed up the Rideau Canal to Bytown. The town's first recorded typhus case, a young girl, was diagnosed on June 5, 1847.

What followed overwhelmed the settlement. Emergency fever sheds were erected along the canal and riverbanks; the gravely ill lay on bare ground or beneath overturned boats. Bytown effectively shut down as residents fled if they could. The Sisters of Charity bore the initial burden of care, but many fell ill themselves. Clergy from both Catholic and Protestant traditions stepped forward, most notably Father Molloy and Rev. Durie, setting aside denominational boundaries in the face of mass suffering.

When Father Molloy himself succumbed and was sent away to recover, Durie remained. Day after day, he ministered in the fever sheds, offering prayer, comfort, and practical assistance to the dying. The strain was immense. Exhausted and exposed, Durie contracted typhus and died unmarried on September 12, 1847. Before his death, he urged those around him to build a hospital for the sick and the poor, a call that would be answered in the years that followed.

Today, Rev. William Durie rests at Beechwood Cemetery, interred in a table tomb beside the Durie family memorial stone. Lett's poetic eulogy, rich in language and conviction, celebrated Durie's charity, humility, friendship, and patriotism, affirming a steadfast belief in eternal life beyond death.



The Beechwood Way 21

Allan Gilmour (1816–1895) - Section 53, Lots 3, 4, 10 & 11

Born on August 23, 1816, in Scotland, Allan Gilmour came of age within the transatlantic timber economy that powered early Canadian development. He learned the lumber trade under the guidance of his uncle, also named Allan Gilmour, a partner in Pollock, Gilmour & Company of Glasgow, a firm whose reach extended across the British Empire with branches in Quebec, Montreal, and Miramichi.

In 1832, the younger Gilmour emigrated to British North America with his cousin James Gilmour and settled in Montreal. There they worked for William Ritchie & Company, the Montreal affiliate of the Gilmour enterprise, managed by their cousin William Ritchie. When Ritchie retired in 1840, the cousins assumed management of the Montreal operation and soon established an agency in Bytown, reflecting the Ottawa Valley's growing centrality to the lumber trade.

For more than a decade, Allan Gilmour travelled frequently between Montreal and Bytown, overseeing procurement, milling, and transport. In 1853, when James Gilmour retired, Allan chose to relocate permanently to Bytown, placing himself at the operational heart of the industry. From there, he supervised the sawing and shipment of millions of board feet of timber, assembled into vast rafts and floated down the Ottawa and St. Lawrence Rivers to the Gilmour timber coves at Quebec for export overseas.

The work was neither simple nor secure. The timber trade was vulnerable to fluctuating markets, river conditions, fire, and financial risk. Yet Gilmour persevered through periodic setbacks with discipline and foresight, building a reputation for steady management rather than speculation. His long tenure reflected a model of industrial leadership grounded in logistics, labour coordination, and endurance rather than headline-grabbing expansion. In 1873, at the age of 57, he retired from active business, having spent more than four decades in the trade.

Gilmour's sense of duty extended beyond commerce. During the Fenian Raids of 1866–1867, he was appointed a major in the local militia, contributing to the defence and organization of the region at a moment of national anxiety. He was later promoted to the rank of colonel, a mark of confidence in his leadership and reliability.

Despite the demands of industry and service, Gilmour was a cultivated man. He maintained a deep interest in poetry and history and was a consistent supporter of the Ottawa Literary and Scientific Society and other local cultural institutions.

His patronage reflects a broader pattern among Bytown's leading figures, who sought to balance economic extraction with intellectual and civic life as the city matured.

Allan Gilmour died on February 25, 1895. His burial at Beechwood Cemetery places him among the principal builders of Ottawa's lumber economy, men whose fortunes rose and fell with the river, and whose enterprises helped transform a frontier settlement into a city of national importance.



George Hay (1821-1910) - Section 37, Lot 117 N

Born on June 18, 1821, in Scotland, George Hay belongs to the generation of practical visionaries who carried Bytown across the threshold from canal town to capital city. Arriving in British North America in 1834, Hay moved to Bytown in 1844 to work with Thomas McKay, gaining firsthand experience in construction, logistics, and the disciplined execution required to build durable institutions in a young settlement.

By 1847, Hay had established his own hardware and construction business on Sparks Street near Elgin—then emerging as a commercial spine of the town. The venture positioned him at the intersection of trade and building, supplying materials and expertise as Bytown expanded its streets, bridges, and public works. His success rested on reliability and range: the ability to source, plan, and deliver in a city still improvising its future.

Hay's imprint on Ottawa is both tangible and symbolic. He designed the city's first coat of arms—an act of civic authorship that helped articulate identity at a moment when Bytown was becoming a city. It is also widely believed that Hay suggested the name Ottawa itself, aligning the place with the river and region that sustained it. Together, these contributions speak to a builder who understood that cities are made not only of stone and timber, but of names, symbols, and shared meaning.

Beyond his own firm, Hay helped found a remarkable array of institutions that anchored Ottawa's economic, religious, and civic life. He was a founder of the Bank of Ottawa, supporting capital formation and commercial confidence; a founder of the Ottawa Board of Trade, strengthening coordination among merchants and manufacturers; and a founder of Knox Church, contributing to the city's spiritual and community infrastructure.



Hay was also among the original shareholders of Beechwood Cemetery, recognizing early the need for a dignified, planned cemetery to serve a growing capital.

That foresight, linking remembrance, land stewardship, and civic identity, mirrors his broader approach to city-building: practical, comprehensive, and future-facing.

George Hay died on April 25, 1910, at the age of 88, having witnessed Ottawa's evolution from frontier town to established capital. His burial at Beechwood places him among the founders who not only profited from growth but actively shaped its institutions and symbols.

Within the Bytown Bicentennial biography series, Hay stands as a quiet architect of permanence, an entrepreneur whose legacy endures in Ottawa's name, emblems, and institutions, and whose work reminds us that cities are built by those willing to invest in both infrastructure and identity.

Dr. Hamnett Hill (1811–1898) - Section 21, Lot 44 NW

Born on December 15, 1811, in London, England, Hamnett Hill belonged to the first generation of professionally trained physicians who brought modern medical practice to Bytown. He received his medical education at London Hospital in Whitechapel, an institution renowned for clinical training amid the demanding conditions of an industrial city.

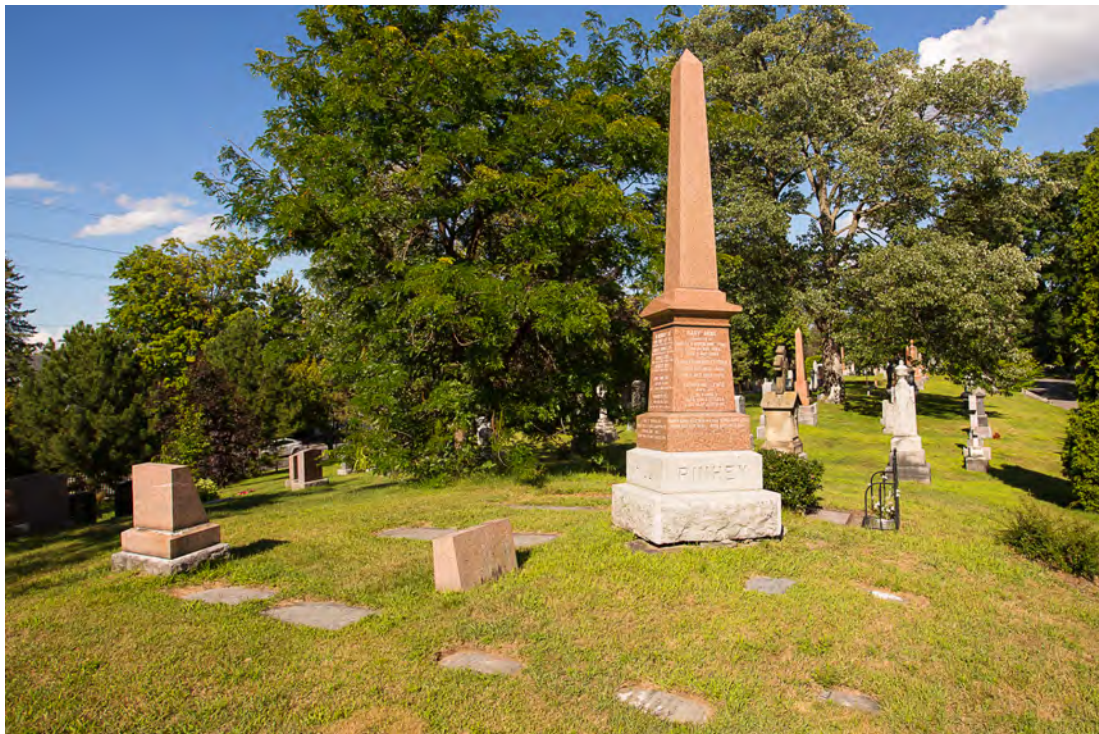
In early 1838, at the age of 26, Hill sailed for British North America. He initially established a small practice in March Township, serving a dispersed rural population where physicians were few and travel was arduous. This early work required adaptability and resilience, qualities that would define his long career.

By 1842, Hill relocated to Bytown, where canal construction, lumbering, and rapid population growth placed increasing pressure on local health services. Practising medicine in a frontier town meant confronting injury, infectious disease, and limited infrastructure, conditions that demanded both clinical skill and civic commitment.

Hill's standing in the community extended beyond his practice. Following the incorporation of Ottawa, he served as a city councillor in the second municipal council, contributing medical insight to early urban governance at a time when public health, sanitation, and access to care were emerging civic priorities.

In 1854, Hill reached the most influential phase of his professional life when he was appointed chief surgeon of the Ottawa General Hospital. In this role, he helped guide one of the city's key medical institutions during its formative years, shaping standards of care and clinical leadership as Ottawa evolved from town to capital.

Dr. Hamnett Hill died on February 10, 1898, after six decades of medical service in eastern Ontario. His interment at Beechwood Cemetery places him among the physicians, civic leaders, and institution-builders who laid the groundwork for Ottawa's public health system.



Jenny (Jeanette) Russell Simpson (1847–1936) - Section 41, Lot 120 NW

Born in Montreal in 1847, Jenny Russell Simpson emerged as one of Ottawa's most consequential stewards of historical memory. The daughter of Andrew Russell, she grew up in an environment attuned to public service and national institutions. Her formative training as an artist, guided by her uncle Alexander Jamieson Russell, equipped her with a discerning eye for visual culture and documentary value. His work for the Canadian Illustrated News and other publications shaped her understanding of how images could carry history forward.

Simpson came to Ottawa in 1866 and soon married John Barker Simpson, son of the Hon. John Simpson. While family life anchored her locally, her professional commitments extended nationally. An accomplished artist in her own right, she was at times employed as a copyist by the Public Archives of Canada, contributing to the preservation and accessibility of primary sources at a moment when Canada's archival infrastructure was still taking shape.

Her most enduring impact, however, came through historical and museum work. From 1915 to 1921, Simpson served as English secretary of Historic Landmarks of Canada, affiliated with the Royal Society of Canada. In this role, she helped professionalize heritage advocacy and broaden its public reach, work that positioned Ottawa as a centre of national commemoration.

Between 1923 and 1932, Simpson was curator of the Bytown Museum, then operating as the Women's Canadian Historical Society of Ottawa. Her tenure marked a turning point. She systematically expanded and organized the collection, secured important acquisitions, including the celebrated Bust of Lady Macdonald (1874), and authored the institution's first comprehensive catalogue, *Guide to the Bytown and Ottawa Historical Museum*.

First published in 1926, Ottawa's centenary year, and reissued in 1929, the guide documented 481 artefacts and established professional standards for cataloguing and interpretation. Simpson's leadership extended beyond collections management.

Largely through her efforts, the Society secured possession of the historic Registry Office, a decisive step that transformed a small volunteer-led collection into a credible municipal museum with a permanent home.

Her advocacy also carried international significance: in 1909, she represented the Women's Canadian Historical Society of Ottawa at the American Historical Association meeting in New York, the first official representation of a Canadian historical society at this prestigious forum. Jenny Russell Simpson died on April 25, 1936.

Her burial at Beechwood Cemetery places her among the builders of Ottawa's civic conscience, individuals whose influence is measured not in monuments alone, but in institutions strengthened, collections saved, and standards set.

