

96 NIAGARA

96 Niagara Blvd. Fort Erie North Ontario was purchased by my grandfather George Frederick Montillon from the Thomas family which owned the farm extending south to Gilmore Rd (at leaat.) in 1900. When the Thomas parents died the property was divided , and what my grandfather bought was about 300 acres with about 180 feet frontage and a depth varying from 500 feet to 600 feet , due to the single track Grand Trunk Railway line whic ran diagonly from the Bridgeburg Railroad Yards to the Ferry Dock in Fort Erie, for the delivery of freight.

The Thomas boys each built himself a smaal house farther south on the property, "Georgie" at ^{NW} the corner of Gilmore Rd And the Niagara Blvd., "Addie"(who I do not remember) just west of "Georgie", and "Johnny" on Idlewylde just west of the church and the Irvine house on the south side.

Although "Grandad" went daily to his Real Estate office in Buffalo, he developed the grounds into a very beautiful garden. Although his schooling was limited he carried his vow to read at least one hour a day throughout his entire life and had a vast knowledge of gardening as well as many other things, and corresponded frequently with the College of Agriculture both in Guelph Ont, and Ithaca New York (Cornell). I spent many Saturday mornings with him either in the garden or in his workshop where he used to spent winter hours refinishing antique furniture.

My Grandmother , the former Abbie Maria^{Ann} Davis, was also an inspiration to me. She had taught school in Buffalo before her marriage, being the first teacher there to use pictures to illustrate Geography. She was also a teacher of mathematics, especially Geometry, I believe. Being very well read herself, she inspired me to read many fascinating books by telling me not to touch them! Thus I read the Conquest Of Mexico, and Peru before I was ten!

My grandparents were both fine singers and had actually met while singing in the Buffalo Philharmonic choir. My Mother studied piano like "Grannie" and became a church organist, and both her brothers ⁿsag well, Uncle Eugene tenor, and Uncle Herbert bass.

Sometime after my father died in 1932 we moved down to 96 Niagara, and I shared the large south east bedroom with my mother, and later I had the north east bedroom to myself, after my brother John moved to Sault Ste. Marie.

We lived at 96 Niagara until 1949 when the property was sold and I bought a house in Port Credit Ont. for my mother and myself where I could commute to my teaching at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto.

My uncle, Eugene Davis Montillon lived at 96 Niagara until he went to Cornell University to study architecture and continued on in Ithaca where he married Muriel Clara Briggs and became a professor of landscape architecture. My mother Elsie Elizabeth Montillon married my father John Brenton Fitz-Gibbon in 1910 instead of teaching mathematics. Dad was a graduate Civil and Mechanical specializing in the designing of buildings and machinery for the production of steel. My uncle, Herbert George Montillon graduated in law at University of Buffalo where he later practised, and married Clara Muriel Diehl of Buffalo, graduate of Cornell University in organ and Choir music with additional studies in Europe. He remained at home in 96 Niagara, setting up a second floor apartment for my grandparents and later changing the barn into a home when my family moved to the house in the 1930s. When the house was sold Uncle Herbert moved to New York City, his wife, "Aunt Clara" having died in ~~1944 on a Palm Sunday on Easter Sunday~~

1944 or 45.

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I regret that I cannot locate a photograph of 96 Niagara as I remember it, nor can my brother Bob. In both cases many of our photographs were destroyed by water.

The basement was built from local rough grey limestone, the first floor of brick, painted dark green, and the second floor and attic of wooden lap siding, also dark green. The north wall was almost entirely covered with the same large leafed ivy as the Anglican church. A verandah ran across the front and part way along each side, being screened from the study door to the front edge. Most of the interior walls were papered above painted wainscote, in either brown or dark green. (My grandmother was furious when I painted the upper kitchen walls pale yellow to let in more light, but after the war (WW II) we made all the living room and dining room light cream. (Granda and Grannie had died a week apart in 1940 at the good ages of 89 and 86) Dates can be checked on their brass burial markers at St. John's Anglican cemetery, Bertie.

Layout plans of house made from my memory are enclosed.

WALTER CURTISS HOUSE

The Walter Curtiss farm abutted my grandfather's property on the north side, and extended west beyond the railway line. I believe this family was also American. The house was a large frame building set about the same distance back as 96 Niagara. Farther back was a large barn and a long narrow second house used by a caretaking family named Swanick.

I never knew this family well although my mother had grown up with their children I was acquainted with their two granddaughters, Alice, and

? whose father James and mother ? lived and worked in Buffalo. I think Mrs James Curtiss was formerly a Risley, but am not certain. Mr Walter Curtiss died at about age 93, but i do not know about his wife. There was a daughter Eleanor who lived with them and was a librarian in Buffalo. Much later Dr. Butters Built a house on the north west corner of the Curtiss property.

The Graham House

The Graham family were an old pioneer family who had a farm off the garrison road where there were two magnificent sugar bushes which we often visited as children. We always loved the syrup ladled onto late spring snow, which turned at once to candy, and sitting on the family doorstep to be given samples taken from the pot for testing the thickness. (I do not believe there were any government regulations then)

Mr. John Graham and his wife Mary had four children. Amy , the eldest was a fine pianist having won the gold medal at the Toronto Conservatory of Music and a scholarship to the Julliard School in New York. From there she went to Europe studying in several countries over a period of four years, and then returned to teach both privately and at the School in Buffalo where teachers were trained. She taught , among others, Miss Willamette Dunn who became organist of the Roman Catholic Church in Fort Erie, Miss Carrie Vahey who became organist of the United Church in Bridgeburg, and my mother who became organist of the St. Paul's Anglican Church, although to tell the truth she did not approve of their changing from the piano to the organ. Unfortunately , when she was just reaching her prime as a concert Pianist, she was stricken with Rheumatoid Arthritis which crippled both her hands and her feet. She was the last in the family to die, living as long as she could in the family house then boarding with the Ralfe family on Battery St, and then on St. George St. in Toronto just north of the Library, and finally becoming a patient in the St. Joseph's Terminal Hospital on King st. in the west end of Toronto, in her 90's.

Margaret Helen Graham, the 2nd child, was also very musical, playing both the piano and the organ, but remained at home to care for her parents

her parents, the third sister Mary Stuart ("Queenis") who was an epileptic and brother Richard (Dick") who, after his war service was hospitalized for Lung Tuberculosis (Consumption) at that time incurable. "Uncle Dick" for some years worked on the mail train to Toronto, and took over his father's Insurance business with Margaret's help.

This family were among my parents best friends and also my grandparents. Whenever I was not at home or at my grandparents I was usually at the Grahams. "Miss Margaret" read Midsummer's Night Dream to me before I went to school, Uncle Dick was always minister for my dolls' christenings, weddings or funerals, and from "Miss Amy" I took piano lessons, studied orchestration, and opera, sang etc etc. She was a demon for good diction and correct word use, but not one who could ever be unkind.

The HERSHEY HOUSE.

Next north of the Graham house was the Hershey house. Miss Emily, the eldest, was definitely the head of the house when I was a child, and had to be talked to through a hearing trumpet, in the parler in what seemed to me to be Sunday clothes. Miss Kate was somewhat crippled from a sleigh accident, and very gentle, and Mrs Thompson, a widowed sister did all the kitchen work. I always remember her as warm, generous, plump and wonderful. Mr, Jack Mann, a nephew, lived with his aunts and managed the gardens, garage and cars, The Misses Hershey had a Buick which was kept up on blocks most of the time, and used only for formal good weather occasions. Mr, Mann had a Chev, "Runabout which he used for every other purpose.

While I was seldom in anything but the kitchen, I did on one occasion see the "parler" which was usually covered with cloths and closed except for formal occasions. It was smaller than the regular living room where Miss Emily sat but much more elegant. There was also a sort of study or business room with its own outside entrance on the north side of the house, a dining room and a very large kitchen on the main floor. I don't ever remember going upstairs.

THE BENNER HOUSE

I don't remember much about the Benner House, although I was often in it on errands or to visit Mrs Benner's mother, Mrs. Johnson. I know it was divided into two halves so that Mrs Johnson had a section for herself I know they had many nephews, and neices with whom I sometimes played, but other than that they did not associate much with the other people on the street.

80 NIAGARA BLVD.

I was born in Port Colborne 5Jan,1915 and moved to Phipp St in Bridgeburg at about 2 years of age. I do not know the exact date, but we moved to 80 Niagara Blvd whn I was about 4 or 5. I can remember walking with Jessie and my doll carriage to our new home. During my first years there I occupied the 2nd floor bedroom at the back of the house with all my dolls. Jessie Webb had come to live with us in Port Colborne shortly after my brother was born, and acted as cook Nanny etc . When I was a child she always wore a striped cotton dress with a full white apron.

It was before I began school that a gas stove in an attic room flared up as they sometimes did and set some clothes afire and much of the top part of the house. I know we lived at 96 Niagara while repairs were made but remember very little about it When we returned to 80 Niagara I found my father had had a special room built fo me over the front verandah.

I have drawn plans of the house as I remember it,as best I can, and enclosed pictures. Without leaves they seem very barren, but in reality the gardens and trees were really beautiful. A second lot to the north of the house gave plenty of space to play. Behind the lawn were four line ofgrape vines running east to west, and behind them a picket fence and then a large vegetable garden. Between the house and the barn just left of the grape vines were several fruit trees, and there were also apple and cherry trees farther back. Immediately behind the barn were two chicken runs and hen houses. where may father raised chickens, as did most of the people along the boulevard. Dad raised White Leghorns in one house and run, and Plymouth Rocks in the other. We also had Bantams and at one time rabbits.

In the north half of the barn Dad built large bins for the chicken grain, and kept the car. Behind this he had a work shop. When we did something wrong we were politely asked to see him in there aftensupper. and after some discussion our punishment was set- sometimes a spanking with a sanded down wooden shingle which we had to get down for him. I cannot remember that we were ever spanked when he was angry! At one time John and a friend had the use of the south half of the barn to repair engines. They were teenagers at thi time and had an old chassis and 2 engines which they could repair and switch to keep the car running.

Because the barn had one been used for horses there were still trap doors from the second floor to drop down hay etc, and one of our pet games was to chase around the barn dropping down a chute ad running up stairs or up a ladder outaide. Later Dad made us a mini golf course above the car. A big family was a lot of fun and we had the Swanick children and another large family often with us.

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Verith

North of 80 Niagara. along the Boulevard.

The first house to our north was the Charles Lewis House. which by my time was occupied by a Mr. and Mrs. Bond, and Mrs. Bond's sister Miss Risley.

Later this house was occupied by a Mr. & Mrs Mullett. Their son was later, adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Henry Lewis who were devoted to him and lived next door.

The second house to our north was the red brick home of Henry and Cassandra Lewis (UNcle Hen and Aunt Cass to us) where their son Bill still lives.

The next house north of that was the old Harry Lewis house- a beautiful old ~~pi~~ ^{er} farm house . When I was a child Uncle Hen's sister Molly , Miss Madeline Nourse and Miss Nourse's mother lived ^{there}. Later they built a brick house on the same property farther north, and the old house was occupied by the Verrill family and then an OPP Officer and his family by the name of Hough. More recently still it became a nursing home.

^{North} Beyond Wintemute St. was the Old Warren Farmhouse. When I was a child Auntie "Mill" Warren Lived with Aunt Cass and Uncle Hen who were in some way related. At that time she was very old and inclined to wander, and one of our favourite duties as children was to go with her if we saw her wandering and gently lead her back to Aunt Cass. Sometimes I would go with her to her house and help her "put out lunch" for "Tom" There ~~was~~ nothing in the house, but we would carefully get dishes she thought were still in the cupboards and set the table etc, certainly stimulating our imaginations and keeping her happy until we could walk her home.

Sometime after "Auntie Mill" died the house was divided into apartments and rented, and I visited it when Miss Rose Seton had the one on the south side. (I think there were just 2 apartments