

This large red brick home on the river road, in the Town of Fort Erie was built by William Forsyth Sr. in 1833 shortly after he left Niagara Falls for Bertie Township. It was built in the American Classical fashion, with large round pillars supporting the portico. In Jan. 1833 William got permission to quarry stone for the home on the margin of the land between Fort Erie (The old fort) and the Ferry landing (Bertie St.) and also from the land south of the Fort, along the Lake Shore. In Feb. of 1833 he got permission to put up the house. It is said that the brick was brought from Hamilton, however the enormous cellar which is twelve feet at least in depth, is constructed of the stone aquired along the Lakeshore at Fort Erie. The dwelling boasts a large circular stairway at the entrance which reaches almost forty feet. It's rooms were heated by four elaborate fireplaces; two on either floor. Those in the double parlors on the ground floor , are of imported Italian marbel brought liver in a sailing ship. The rooms have very high ceilings , fourteen ft. in height; but inspite of the large outward appearance of the home, they are not numerous.

To the right of the entrance way, is the front parlor, and on the left side of this is a small room that could have been a serving pantry. Directly behind is the second parlor, and to it's rear a rather small dining room. To the side of this, facing Phipps is a very narrow kitchen . An original sketch of the home in the 1870's shows an extension running from the back of the house, south west to the roadway ; that could have been a summer kitchen or storage space. Except for a bathroom , put in many years later; this is the ground floor plan as I remember it. Upstairs are four bedrooms of average size , with high celings; and a room that was perhaps an upstairs sitting room, or a room for servants.

The Forsyths were noted smugglers; so along with the necessary household goods, the large cellar was capable of storing many other articles. The walls which are some fourteen to fifteen ft. in height are of cut flagstone, and the floor of dirt; except for one small room which had a brick floor and plastered walls, and celing. It no doubt was used for storing food or beverages. During the Fenian Raids it has been said that a portion of the cellar was used to house prisoners.

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by Louis Mc. Dermott.

It has always been popular belief, that the cellar contained a tunnel connecting it with the river; however there has never been any written proof. Kerby talked of a cave along the river's edge, however he did not describe it as a tunnel, or connect it with Bertie Hall.

An article from the Niagara Fall's Review, dated Oct. 20th., 1954 mentions a SMUGGLER'S CAVE belonging to a Col. William Forsyth. It gives his birthdate as 1758, as his place of birth as Pennsylvania. It also goes on to say that he championed the cause of the British and American Tories. This birthdate does not fit, our William or that of his son William Forsyth Jr., and many of the facts in the article are very confusing. However the discription of the Cave, is very believing and no doubt the fact that it was nicknamed the Smugglers Home, accounts for the stories that have come down, of a tunnel in Bertie Hall.

It states that from 1828 to 1865 it was used by the underground to house Negro slaves escaping from the United States. This confirms my belief that Bertie Hall itself was never used for this purpose. In 1865 it fell into disrepair, and was demolished.

On my tour of the old home in 1967, I searched as many had before me, for signs of this tunnel and found nothing. Mr. Ed Forsyth of Lockport N.Y. made a similar tour of Bertie Hall, while Frank Pattison was alive and mentioned finding nothing. Mr. Killbridge, the owner after F. Pattison was again unsuccessful in proving any truth to this old tale and so it remains to-day: just that.

The pillars at the front of the house were in desperate need of repair during the Pattison occupation, and as the cost of replacing them as they originally were, was prohibitive; he had them formed in cement over a slab lining, and they now have a squared appearance that does nothing for the outward appearance.

After the death of William Forsyth Sr., although the home was left to his wife Jane, it's running, was taken over by his son Issac Brock. At his death it passed on to his son; William Brock Forsyth.

In 1876, John Crabb was proprietor of Bertie Hall Hotel, as recorded in The Official Atlas of Lincoln and Welland Counties: by H.R. Page. The old home came into the hands of Stephen M. Jarvis who laid out the village of Victoria. He in turn sold to Robert G. Barrett 1882. In 1901 Frank Pattison bought the home from R.G. Barrett, and lived in it till the time of his death in 1965. Bertie Hall was left to the Pattison Estate, and in 1968 was sold to John T. Killbridge of Buffalo N.Y. Bertie Hall came up for sale the summer of 1981, and through the efforts of the Bertie Historical Society it was purchased by the Niagara Parks Commission: to house the Mahoney collection of doll house.