

UNFORTUNATE CHILD

... not John A. of Kingston,
for by all accounts he'd rather drink whiskey than make it,
but John A. of Perth,
who'd rather sell it than drink it ...¹

John A. McLaren (1831-1901)



On Saturday December 7, 1901, 70-year-old John A. McLaren, suffered what the local newspaper called “a slight apoplectic attack”²; but despite the best efforts of local practitioner Dr. David Munro (1842-1903), assisted by “Dr. Stewart³, the Montreal specialist”, Perth’s ‘Whiskey⁴ King’ died of “acute spinal paralysis”⁵ on Wednesday, December 11th.

Described by the *Perth Courier* as the community’s “keenest businessman and largest individual taxpayer”⁶, McLaren was a very wealthy man and, as his condition deteriorated over those five days in December, business associates, employees, friends, family and the merely curious converged on his Wilson Street⁷ home.

Among these was his half-sister, Elizabeth ‘Eliza’ Cameron-McIntyre (1841-1915) of Renfrew, who arrived at his bedside on Monday evening December 9th. Eliza’s concern, however, was not primarily for John A.’s comfort in his final hours, but for what she hoped to gain by his imminent death. Two days later, as John A. breathed his last, Eliza crept into “a room at the end of the hall [and], from the top of a red box, took down a brown valise”⁸ containing McLaren’s most important personal papers. She broke open the lock, extracted her brother’s last will and testament and, enraged by what she read, “sent it up in smoke”.⁹

¹ *Perth Courier*, December 15, 1865.

² *Perth Courier*, December 13, 1901.

³ Probably Dr. James O. Stewart (1846-1906), McGill University Professor 1884-1893, Attending Physician at Montreal General Hospital 1886-1890 and First Physician in Chief of the Royal Victoria Hospital, Montreal, 1893-1906. Stewart was highly regarded as ‘Canada’s best-known neurologist’.

⁴ Historically the Scots have spelled the word ‘Whisky’, with no ‘e’, while the Irish spelled it ‘Whiskey’ with an ‘e’. The Americans have generally adopted the latter spelling, while in Canada both spellings are in use. Product labels from both the McLaren Distillery and the Spalding & Stewart Distillery at Perth used both spellings, one or the other, at various times.

⁵ *Perth Courier*, December 13, 1901. The terminology used by the *Courier* does not appear to have an exact modern equivalent, but John A. McLaren apparently died of a stroke.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Located approximately where Stewart School now stands.

⁸ *Perth Courier*, May 9, 1902.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Eliza's rash and nearly inexplicable act, and later denial that a will had ever existed, led to a desperate legal challenge on the part of her siblings and other intended inheritors to secure their rights and prevent forfeiture of the entire estate to the Crown. When that case was heard at Perth's Lanark County Court House, over five days in May and June 1902, the *Courier* commented that,

Not for many years have the people of Perth and the district surrounding been so absorbed in one topic of conversation as they have been in the action brought to establish the will of the late John A. McLaren. From the first the Court Chambers were well filled by spectators, who at times filled the aisles and passageways as well as all available seats, a feature being the large number of ladies present at every sitting ... and many ladies, rather than leave their seats in the court, took lunches with them and did not go home at noon or in the evening.¹⁰



John Alexander McLaren (1831-1901)

Most spectators of the day were primarily interested in the 'behind-closed-doors' foibles of the McLaren-Stewart-Cameron clan, as brought to light through the testimony and evidence offered; but many also understood that Divisional Court Justice Hugh McMahon's (1836-1911) ruling could shape the future of Perth for decades to come. That the impact of his decision on the town would be so profound and so far-reaching as to be recognizable a century later, however, few could have anticipated.

Robert McLaren -

Whiskey King John Alexander McLaren, known familiarly throughout his life as 'John A.'¹¹, was born in McNab Township, Renfrew County¹², on November 27, 1831, the illegitimate son of Robert McLaren (1799-1848) and Elizabeth Alexander (1801-1877).

¹⁰ *Perth Courier*, May 28, 1902.

¹¹ His middle name of 'Alexander' may have honored his unknown paternal grandfather or have been a nod to his mother Elizabeth Alexander.

¹² As recorded on his crypt plaque in the McLaren-Stewart Mausoleum at Elmwood Cemetery, Perth, Ontario.

His father, Robert, born at Glasgow, was most likely the son of William McLaren/McLaurin and Clementine Gilchrist¹³, and arrived with them in McNab or Horton Township among settlers brought from Scotland between 1825 and 1830 by Laird Archibald McNab (1779-1860)¹⁴ or among the chain migration that followed. Also among these early immigrants to what is now Renfrew County was one Marion Gilchrist-Alexander-Forrest and her daughter Elizabeth Alexander¹⁵. Clementine Gilchrist-McLaren and Marion Gilchrist-Alexander-Forrest were very likely sisters, thus making John A. McLaren's parents, Robert McLaren and Elizabeth Alexander, first cousins.

Robert McLaren's departure from Renfrew County in about 1830 can only be seen as flight from the responsibilities of marriage and fatherhood. That he moved no further than the Perth Settlement related to his connection with the McLean family of North Elmsley Township, an association apparently formed in Horton Township and maintained in multiple ways throughout his life. Thomas McLean (1792-1851), one of seven brothers who settled in North Elmsley and Burgess Townships between 1815 and 1841, spent considerable time between 1825 and 1829 performing settlement duties¹⁶ at Horton Township C-1/L-5 on behalf of his brother, Dr. John McLean (1788-1840)¹⁷. One of the men Thomas McLean employed to help him clear the land was John Cameron who would later (c1833) marry Elizabeth Alexander, Robert McLaren's one-time lover and John A. McLaren's mother.¹⁸ Clearly, McLaren, McLean, Cameron and Alexander were well acquainted in Horton and McNab Townships during the second half of the 1820s.

Several accounts of Robert McLaren's life claim that he "*arrived at Perth in 1816 [as] one of the earliest settlers*"¹⁹ and erected "*a stone building on Plum Point*"²⁰, south of Beveridge Bay, [and that] *this distillery, located on Stonehouse Island, began producing rye whiskey c1817*"²¹

Another source describes Robert McLaren's enterprise as "*the first distillery in this Upper Canada settlement ... originally located in a stone building on Plum Point*".²² Yet another account has it that "*Robert McLaren started his career in Perth as a shoemaker [before he] went into the manufacture of malt liquor and built a small distillery on an island near Oliver's Ferry*"²³.

¹³ See *The McLaren Distillery and the McLean Connection*, by M.E. Irene Spence (2019), ISBN 978-0-9917350-1-3.

¹⁴ Archibald 13th Laird of McNab (1779-1860) of Glen Dochart, Perthshire. About a dozen families arrived from Scotland in 1825, followed by another 15 families in 1829 and an additional 39 families recruited by McNab from the Montreal area in the late 1820s.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Alexander's father, John Alexander, died shortly after her birth and her widowed mother, Marion, married John Forrest (1786-1880) in 1805. John and Marion Forrest, their eight children and Elizabeth emigrated to Upper Canada in about 1825.

¹⁶ In order to qualify for ownership of (Title Deed to) a Crown land grant, settlers were, within a fixed time frame, required to clear and fence five acres of land, plant a crop, build a shanty and clear the roadway fronting the property.

¹⁷ 'Dr.' John McLean was a half-pay Royal Navy Surgeon and Perth Military Settlement 'Soldier Settler' who's 800 acres in land grants were divided between North Elmsley Township (Lanark County) and Horton Township (Renfrew County). Horton Township adjoins McNab Township, site of Laird Archibald McNab's doomed attempt to recreate the medieval highlands.

¹⁸ See *The McLaren Distillery and the McLean Connection*, by M. E. Irene Spence (2019) ISBN 978-0-9917350-1-3.

¹⁹ Arlene Stafford Wilson www.arlenestaffordwilson.wordpress.com

²⁰ Sometimes spelled 'Plumb' Point, a short distance downstream from Oliver's/Rideau Ferry. An Archaeological Survey of Canada paper by Jerome S. Cybulski, *Human Skeletal Remains From Plum Point & Bio-Temporal Identification in Ontario Prehistory* (1981), published in *Ontario Archeology* No.37, places Plum Point "*on the west bank of Lower Rideau Lake in eastern Ontario, at 44° 52' 25" N, 76° 07' 00" W, 1.5 km south of Port Elmsley and 10 km east-southeast of Perth*", coordinates that match Briggs Island close to Stonehouse Island.

²¹ *Whiskey & Wickedness*, by Larry D. Cotton.

²² Undated Perth Historical Society paper, by Archibald Campbell, Perth Museum Curator.

²³ *Perth Courier*, May 22, 1914. Oliver's Ferry is now called Rideau Ferry.

There is in fact no evidence that Robert McLaren was among the “*earliest settlers*” arriving at Perth in 1816, or in the immediate years thereafter. In fact, he was still living in Glasgow until about 1825, by which time there were several whiskey stills already operating at Perth, so McLaren’s was not “*the first*”. Likewise, although he might have been apprenticed to a shoemaker²⁴ in Scotland, he did not follow that trade in Canada. From about 1830, however, he did run a 30-gallon still located at or near Plum Point at the mouth of the Tay River in Elmsley Township. Apart from serving a few local farmers, his Plum Point still met demand for whiskey among the thousands of workers laboring on the Rideau Canal.

When Thomas McLean completed his work in Horton Township and rejoined his brothers in Elmsley Township in 1829, Robert McLaren was either with him or close behind as he is documented in Elmsley by 1830²⁵. He appears to have lived and farmed on C-6/L-15 from about that time²⁶ and, in February 1836, he and Thomas McLean’s brother Alexander (1804-1856) jointly (as tenants in common) purchased that lot and four months later purchased the adjoining land at C-6/L-16(Pt).

Although these purchases were not finalized until 1836, negotiations to buy C-6/L-15(Pt), where McLaren had taken up residence, had been ongoing from about 1830 and, indeed, money had been paid for the property in 1831²⁷. That property included,

*“... part of the broken front of Lot No. 15 [a point of land] called and designated ‘Plum Point’ on the ‘Perth Landing’ place, situated on the north easterly corner of said broken front at or near the mouth or outlet of the River Tay at its junction with the Rideau Lake ...”*²⁸

Prior to completion of the Rideau Canal in 1832, a point of high ground at the south-eastern corner of Elmsley Township C-6/L-15, on the western bank of the Tay River mouth, protruded into Lower Rideau Lake, and was known as ‘Plum Point’²⁹. Construction of the canal system (1826-1832) raised the water level by six feet³⁰, flooded low-lying land around the Tay River mouth, and turned ‘Plum Point’ into an island.

²⁴ His marriage announcement of 1835 mentions his profession as cordwainer (shoemaker).

²⁵ See *The McLaren Distillery and the McLean Connection*, by M. E. Irene Spence (2019) ISBN 978-0-9917350-1-3.

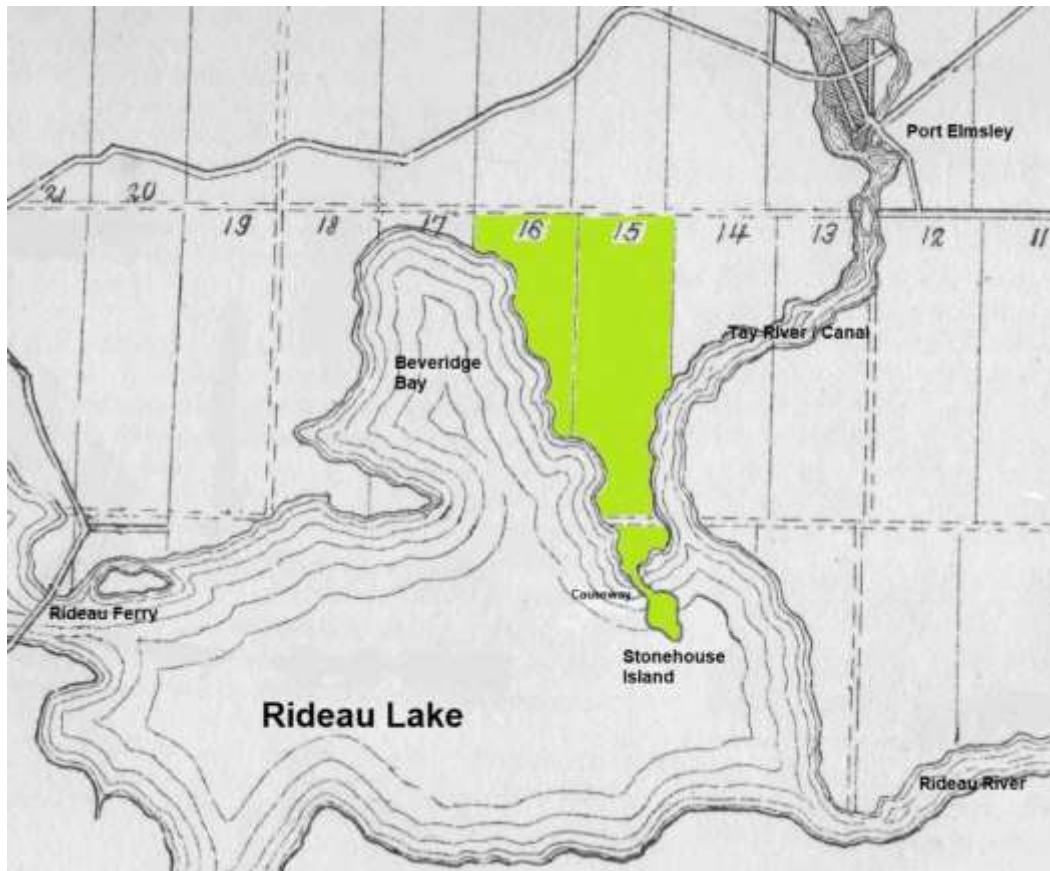
²⁶ Ibid. Page-8.

²⁷ Ibid. Page-7&8. Negotiations were conducted by Alexander McLean. Concluding the purchase took more than five years because one William G. White, representing the deceased former owner of C-6/L-15(Pt), lived in India, and there was some confusion concerning who White’s agent in Canada was. As a former Clergy Reserve lot, C-6/L-16(Pt) was purchased from the Canada Company.

²⁸ As described in the December 31, 1852 deed of sale when Alexander McLean sold the property to Alexander Brown. Quoted from *North Elmsley Township, Doorway to the Past*, by Shirley Jones-Wellman, Michael McEwen, M. E. Irene Spence and Jim Winton (2016).

²⁹ ‘Technically’ Plum Point should have been part of Lot-15 in Concession-5 not Concession-6, but since only those few acres of C-5/L-15 (the point) were above water, for ownership purposes it was apparently considered to be part of C-6/L-15 from which it extended.

³⁰ Specifically, the Poonamalie Dam.



Elmsley Township Lots C-16 and C-17

In an effort to link Perth to the Rideau Canal, and thus with Kingston, Bytown and Montreal, the first Tay Canal was constructed between 1831 and 1834. It followed the course of the Tay River and joined the Rideau Canal where the Tay spilled into Lower Rideau lake³¹. It was not, however, a success. One historian described the venture as “... a debt-ridden, shallow, inadequate trough where the hopes of Perth were gradually drowned”.³² Built on the cheap, it was too shallow, and its five locks too small to accommodate vessels designed for the more substantial infrastructure of the Rideau Canal³³. Its developers, the Tay Navigation Company (TNC), were, therefore, forced to establish a depot for the transshipment of cargo from Rideau Canal steamers and barges to smaller boats capable of passing up the Tay Canal. Initial attempts to do so at the first lock near the hamlet of Fishing Falls or Barbados (now Port Elmsley) were thwarted by the Weatherhead family who owned all of the surrounding land and, moreover, had built their own transfer depot. In an effort to intercept cargos before they could reach the Weatherhead depot, the TNC looked to establish a landing and warehouse down-stream at the river/canal mouth.

³¹ Reconstruction/improvement of the Tay Canal between 1885 and 1891 included deepening the draft, building locks of the same size as the Rideau Canal and a dug channel connecting the Tay to Lower Rideau Lake at Beveridge Bay.

³² *The First Tay Canal in the Rideau Corridor, 1830-1850*, by Larry Turner (2009).

³³ Rideau Canal locks measured 41 metres (134 feet) long by 10 metres (33 feet) wide, with a depth of 1.5 metres (5 feet), while the Tay Canal locks were only 27 metres (89 feet) long by 6.1 metres (20 feet) wide, with a depth of 1.1 metre (3 feet 7 inches).

Meanwhile, Robert McLaren and his partner Alexander McLean acquired the Plum Point island property as part of C-6/L-15 before the TNC could (or thought to) purchase it. In 1833 another McLean brother, Robert, loaned his sister Janet McLean (c1811-1861) and Robert McLaren (jointly) the substantial sum of £200. This 'note of hand' did not state the purpose of the loan, but it probably helped finance construction of a stone warehouse on the island that had once been Plum Point, and building a causeway reconnecting the island to the mainland.³⁴ That they did not as yet hold title to the property does not seem to have discouraged McLaren and the McLean's from forging ahead. In the winter of 1834-1835, more than a year before they finalized purchase of North Elmsley C-6/L-15&16, another McLean sibling, William (1792-1873), was employed by Robert McLaren "*drawing stones and hay*", work very likely associated with the warehouse and causeway construction.³⁵

With completion of the warehouse and causeway³⁶ in about 1835, the former Plum Point became known as 'Stonehouse Island'³⁷ or, alternately, as 'Perth Landing' when Robert McLaren was appointed Tay Navigation Company representative at the new transshipment depot. McLaren took to this assignment with enthusiasm and tenacity and was soon regarded as "*a particularly obstinate agent ... [who] gave the forwarders a hard time in seeking to bypass the Perth Landing*"³⁸ and by 1838 Perth merchants William and John Bell were warning their agents at Bytown to,

*... caution the masters of boats against paying any attention to the reports they might hear at the mouth of the [Tay] river. You are perhaps not aware that Mr. McLaren who receives the goods at the [Perth] Landing has a share in the boats issuing from this place [Perth] besides charging storage on all goods left with him and is therefore interested in preventing the Ottawa boats from coming up".*³⁹

Forwarding companies, and the merchants they represented, soon concluded that transshipping their goods to land transport at Oliver's Landing (Rideau Ferry) was often a faster, cheaper and more reliable means of getting cargos to Perth than becoming entangled in either the Weatherhead-TNC dispute at Barbados (Port Elmsley) or dealing with Robert McLaren at Perth Landing (Stonehouse Island).

The Plum Point whiskey still "*... was housed in the stone warehouse*"⁴⁰, and with forwarders and barge captains doing everything they could to avoid Perth Landing, depot manager Robert McLaren had plenty time to tend it.

³⁴ See *The McLaren Distillery and the McLean Connection*, by M. E. Irene Spence (2019) ISBN 978-0-9917350-1-3.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Like so much of the TNC infrastructure the causeway was inadequate to the need and under water more often than not. Access to the site was often only assured when the lake froze.

³⁷ Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources & Forestry - Stonehouse Island 44° 52' 13" N, 76° 6' 52" W

³⁸ *The First Tay Canal in the Rideau Corridor, 1830-1850*, by Larry Turner (2009).

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ *North Elmsley Township, Doorway to the Past*, by Shirley Jones-Wellman, Michael McEwen, M. E. Irene Spence and Jim Winton (2016).

The Stonehouse Island still predated the TNC's Perth Landing installation by a number of years, however, and had probably been in operation at or near Plum Point from about the time Robert McLaren occupied the property in 1830 or 1831. Several sources report that in 1831 Robert McLaren purchased the first whiskey still to operate at Perth, a rye whiskey still established in 1818 by half-pay officer and merchant Henry Graham (1794-1846). McLaren does not seem to have been in business at Perth until a decade later so the Plum Point and the Graham still may be one in the same, McLaren perhaps having moved Graham's apparatus to his North Elmsley Township property to be closer to the Rideau Canal navvies.

The Plum Point or Stonehouse Island still was Robert McLaren's initial foray into the whiskey trade. While Plum Point would continue to produce whiskey, however irregularly, until about 1850, in 1839 McLaren expanded operations by licensing a second 40-gallon copper still at Perth on the west end of Cockburn Island (possibly on the site of the 1818 Graham still). In 1841 McLaren expanded that site with the purchase of another 5½ acres of island land from the Tay Navigation Company.

In addition to his freight forwarding responsibilities, part ownership of Tay Canal barges, and the distilling business, Robert McLaren also invested in Perth real estate, including construction in 1848 of a two-storey stone building on a prime location opposite the Market Square at 81 Gore Street East⁴¹. The site



McLaren Building, 81 Gore Street East, built 1848

was developed at a time "when the 'island' was overgrown with reeds and partly covered with water [and demanded] a lot of filling up"⁴². Over the years the building provided both retail and residential space.

Janet McLean -

John A. McLaren's birth mother, Elizabeth Alexander, had arrived in Renfrew County at the age of 29, with her mother and stepfather who settled on Admaston Township, C-1/L-1. When her illegitimate son John A. was born in 1831 neither Robert McLaren nor Elizabeth Alexander were married, but Elizabeth's pregnancy did not lead to matrimony and, even before John A.'s birth, Robert abandoned Elizabeth and her child in Renfrew County to begin his distilling career on the banks of Beveridge Bay. About two years later (c1833), Elizabeth married John Cameron (1788-1870)⁴³, the man hired to help Robert McLean clear his brother's lot in Horton Township.

⁴¹ Opposite today's Perth Town Hall. The site, Lot-4, had been purchased in 1836 from the Tay Navigation Company by Janet McLaren and her brother Alexander McLean and then purchased from them by Robert McLaren in 1846. See *The McLaren Distillery and the McLean Connection*, by M. E. Irene Spence (2019) ISBN 978-0-9917350-1-3. As Robert McLaren died in the same year this building was constructed, his widow and inheritor Janet McLaren was probably responsible for completing the project. In 1912 the McLaren Building was purchased by the federal government, demolished in 1914, and replaced by a post office in 1932. That post office building today serves as the offices of Crain & Schooley Insurance Brokers & Financial Corporation.

⁴² *Perth Courier*, November 24, 1899.

⁴³ Their first child, Marion Cameron, was born in 1834.

Then, on June 6, 1835, at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Perth⁴⁴, Robert McLaren married Janet McLean (1811-1861).

Like her siblings, Janet McLean had been born in Dumfries-shire, Scotland, the daughter of William John McLean (1747-1824) and Janet Huddleston (1762-1837)⁴⁵. In a chain migration over the years 1815 through 1841, Janet, seven of her brothers, her sister⁴⁶ and her widowed mother all emigrated from Dumfries-shire and settled in North Elmsley Township. Janet and her mother arrived in 1827 and, as Reverend William Bell recorded in his diary, 16-year-old Janet had an eventful voyage.

One day Dr. [John] McLean called and asked me to take a walk in the garden. He had evidently something troubling his mind. When we got a little way from the house, he told me he feared his sister was pregnant by the Captain of the ship in which she came from Scotland.

She and her Mother were the only cabin passengers and the old lady had much to say about the kindness of the Captain. Little, it appears, did she suspect the cause. Whenever they had a fine day, he had a chair placed for her on deck, while he paid attention to her daughter below; and so well did they manage this concealment that it did not appear she ever expected what was going on.

The consternation and grief of the whole family, on her pregnancy being known may be easily conceived. Even her young friends, who paid attentions to her felt hurt and ashamed. Her illness, when confined, was severe and protracted. And few thought she would recover. She did however recover, but the child died.⁴⁷

Janet's dalliance with the ship captain may have brought down "consternation and grief" upon her relatives and friends, but it seems to have done little long-term damage to her standing within the family; possibly because her position was bolstered by financial resources she held in her own name - perhaps having received an inheritance from her father who died in 1824. In North Elmsley she paid a share of family expenses and was more than once called upon to loan money to her brothers. In 1834 she purchased a lot on Cockburn Island in Perth, jointly with her brother Alexander.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Marriage performed by Rev. T. C. Wilson and witnessed by James Templeton and George Romanes.

⁴⁵ The family of William John Mclean and Jane Huddleston were: Dr. John RN (1788-1840), William (1792-1873), Thomas (1792-1851), Robert (1799-1844), David (1802-1861), Alexander (1804-1856), James (1806-1841), Margaret (b.1810) and Janet (1811-1861).

⁴⁶ Margaret McLean (b.1810).

⁴⁷ Reverend William Bell diary, September 1827.

⁴⁸ See *The McLaren Distillery and the McLean Connection*, by M. E. Irene Spence (2019) ISBN 978-0-9917350-1-3.

A 'close' relationship seems to have existed between Janet McLean and Robert McLaren well before their marriage in 1835. McLaren is on record as paying her brother Robert for the board and lodging of "Mrs. McLaren" from January 1832 to June 1833⁴⁹. Further, the 1833 loan of £200 from her brother Robert, which probably helped fund the Stonehouse Island project, was made to her and Robert McLaren jointly, suggesting that, even two years before they married, the McLean's already regarded Robert and Janet as a 'couple'.

Robert and Janet McLaren's union would be childless, but back in Horton Township John Cameron and Elizabeth Alexander-Cameron produced a family of seven half-siblings for Elizabeth's first-born, John A. McLaren;

- Marion (1834-1875), married John McNab (1820-1874) in 1867.
- Hugh (1835-1910), married Jane McIntyre (1835-1915) in 1885.
- Isabella (1837-1876), unmarried.
- Robert (1837-1892), married Janet Alexander (b.1841).
- Janet/Jennie (1839-1873), married Alexander Stewart Jr. (1837-1918) in 1864.
- Elizabeth (1841-1915), married Duncan McIntyre (1833-1916) in 1860.
- Barbara (1842-1906), married Robert Alexander Stewart (1840-1922) c1864.

Robert McLaren's illegitimate son, John Alexander, apparently lived with his mother in Renfrew County until about the time she married John Cameron c1833, or until Robert McLaren married Janet McLean in 1835; thereafter, from the age of about three or four, he was raised as an only child by his father and stepmother at Perth.

McLaren Distillery -

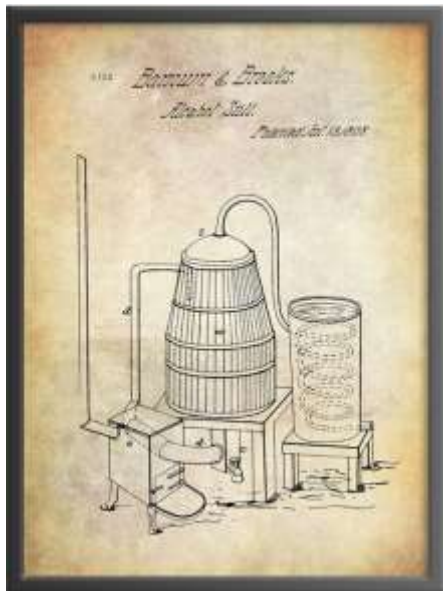
Irishman Henry Graham, a half-pay Lieutenant of the 103rd Regiment of Foot, established Perth's first whiskey still in 1818, located on the main branch of the Tay River at the east end of what is now Stewart Park. In 1821, when his distillery was the only one operating in Perth, he paid taxes on an output capacity of 54 gallons. Graham soon had plenty of competition, however. By 1827 still licenses at Perth and its immediate environs were also held by William Morris, Roderick Matheson, Benjamin DeLisle, John Ferguson, Joshua Adams, John Richey, Richard Rogerson, James Hall, John Kerr, Andrew Oliver and Francis Jessop. How many additional unlicensed stills there may have been can never be known; as John A. later observed, "*the very acme of heroism with the highlander of Scotland or the well-to-do Irish peasant was the illicit distillation of Mountain Dew for the Scotch or Potteen for the Irish*".⁵⁰

Most of these early distillers produced rye whiskey in wooden tub-stills, from a concoction of rye, barley, smutty wheat, frost damaged potatoes and corn that was mashed but not made into malt. These stills were constructed of staves bound with iron hoops, or even a hollow log, tapering toward an open top. The interior was divided into two or three chambers by horizontal wooden or copper plates, with the steam pipe going into the bottom chamber and the copper outflow pipe passing through the open-topped chamber where the wort (liquid drained from the mash) was poured to be warmed by the pipe. The center chamber was equipped with a copper manifold device allowing the steam to enter from below without letting the liquid leak back. Each

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Montreal Commercial Review*, August 3, 1878.

chamber was also fitted with a valve to allow the wort to fall through to the chamber below. From the exit pipe at the top, steam passed into a copper coil condenser. Robert McLaren's Plum Point still was almost certainly of the wooden tub-still design, producing rye whiskey.

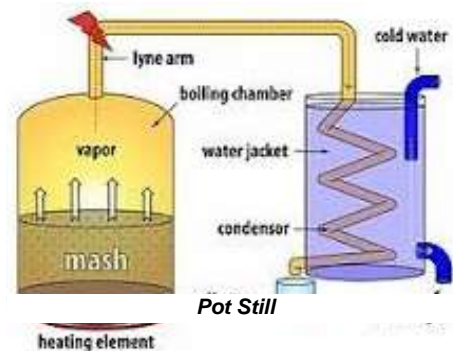


Wooden Tub Still

Wooden tub-still rye whiskey was popular and sold well, but the quality and flavor were inferior to 'pot-still' whiskey made in copper kettles from malted barley. In the early 19th century at Perth, barley was in short supply and copper was a very expensive commodity, but in about 1825 John 'Craigdarroch' Ferguson (1780-1857)⁵¹ became the first local distiller to make malt 'Scotch' whiskey in a copper pot-still. At a location on Wilson Street, between what is now the Red Fox Pub and Code's Mill, he distilled a product branded as 'Craigdarroch of Perth'⁵². John MacTaggart (1791-1830), Clerk of Works for Rideau Canal engineer Lieutenant Colonel John By (1779-1836), thought Ferguson's product "...the most excellent spirit distilled in this country ... made after the Glenlivet mode, the flavour is very good".⁵³

A pot-still at its simplest consists of a large copper kettle or pot which is heated from the bottom, boiling off wort from a mash of malted grain, sending the alcohol vapors to a condenser coil. Copper stills produced a greatly superior product in terms of taste and texture. In the distilling process copper reacts on a molecular level with sulfurs put out by the fermenting yeast and cancels-out the bitter sulfur taste. In the wooden tub-still, that sulphur stayed with the liquid. In the copper still, the sulphur molecules bind with the copper, making hydrogen-sulfide, which becomes copper sulfate. The copper sulfate remains in the still rather than going out with the liquid and is then cleaned out when the still is cleaned.

As the Rideau Canal neared completion in 1831 and began to flood around Plum Point, Robert McLaren joined the local distilling fraternity with his North Elmsley Township tub still. In the same year, construction of the Tay Canal, linking Perth to the new Rideau system, was undertaken, offering the prospect of faster and cheaper shipment of goods in and out of the town, including whiskey. By 1836, a year after the Tay Canal went into operation, "*Perth had eight taverns, seven stores selling liquor, three distilleries and a brewery*"⁵⁴.



⁵¹ Distiller John Ferguson was married to Helen Buchanan (1804-1836), daughter of Rev. George Buchanan (1761-1835), the first Presbyterian Minister in Beckwith Township (Franktown).

⁵² Named for Craigdarroch, seat of the Chief of the Dumfriesshire Fergusons near Moniaive, Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland.

⁵³ *Three Years in Canada*, by John MacTaggart (1829). Elsewhere in his book MacTaggart described the liquor more commonly available in Upper Canada as hootch "*made from frosty potatoes, hemlock, pumpkins and black mouldy rye ... No hell broth that the witches concocted of yore can equal it ... this absolute poison of Upper Canada, the laudanum that sends thousands of settlers to their eternal rest every season*".

⁵⁴ *Perth: Traditions & Style in Eastern Ontario*, by Larry Turner (1992).

Robert McLaren's copper pot still at Perth, licensed in 1839, began producing malt scotch whiskey in 1841. As labels used over the following six decades show, the official founding of 'Perth Distillery', aka 'McLaren's Distillery' dates from inauguration of that 1841 still, and the switch from tub-still rye whiskey to pot-still malt scotch whiskey. Robert McLaren apparently did not hold the rye whiskey he had been producing at Plum Point for at least a decade in much esteem. Only a single malt Scotch, 'Usquebaugh', was worthy of branding with this name.

By 1841 quality and price competition in the distilling business was shaking out the weaker and part-time participants. A decade earlier Bathurst District had boasted more than a dozen stills, but that number had been cut by half leaving only the copper stills of Peter McArthur in Beckwith (33 gallons), Angus McNab at Arnprior (30 gallons) and Robert McLaren at Perth (40 gallons); with the wooden stills of George Lyon (100 gallons) and Thomas E. Daniel (65 gallons) at Richmond, and of Orin Pierce (60 gallons) at Carleton Place. By the mid-1840s McLaren's output capacity at Perth grew to 83 gallons and in 1848 only McLaren, at Perth, and McArthur, in Beckwith, paid the £10 license fee to operate stills.

Robert McLaren was just hitting his stride as a distiller and entrepreneur when he died, at the age of just 49 years, on November 26, 1848; "... *at his residence here, on Sunday last, very suddenly, Mr. Robert McLaren, Distiller*".⁵⁵ If Reverend William Bell is to be believed, McLaren was the victim of over indulgence in his own product.

*Every now and then an awful warning is given to drunkards by the sudden death of one of their number. Among these I may notice the death of Robert McLaren, a distiller. He had long been a notorious drunkard and though often warned of the consequences, would not desist, till he was suddenly destroyed without remedy.*⁵⁶

Of his burial in the Presbyterian section of the Old Burying Ground on Craig Street in Perth, Bell observed,

*As he was well known, a great company attended his funeral. His coffin was covered with velvet and with yellow ornaments to a disgusting extent.*⁵⁷

John A. McLaren was 17 years old, and thus still a minor, when his father died in 1848 so, excepting one other bequest to a McLean niece⁵⁸, Robert McLaren's will⁵⁹ left,

⁵⁵ *Bathurst Courier*, December 1, 1848.

⁵⁶ Rev. William Bell diary, 1848. There can be little doubt that Robert McLaren was probably a heavy drinker, most men of his generation were. However, that in less than two decades, a "*notorious drunkard*" could have built and sustained the prosperous business represented by the McLaren Distillery and other investments, and become the richest man in Perth, seems highly unlikely. In his youth Reverend Bell was known to take a social glass on occasion, and even produced his own wine, but when his son William died of drink in 1844, Bell took 'the pledge' and by 1848 opposed alcohol with an unforgiving ferocity seen only among the 'converted'.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ £400 went to Anne Miller McLean (1833-1901), daughter of William McLean (1792-1873) and his first wife Helen/Ellen Ruddesdale (d.1837). She married John Shine Coombs (1821-1889) in 1849.

⁵⁹ Probate, Lanark County, Perth, Ontario, Index Register Book, Roll No. 420 ONTR-1, books by date: Robert McLaren Book-B 1858-1866 Page 115. Robert McLaren's will is dated November 26, 1847, exactly one year before his death on November 26, 1848.

... unto my wife, Janet McLaren ... full and absolute control of all and singular real estate and landed property ... together with the full and absolute control of my personal property, goods and chattels ... during her natural life, to use and possess according to her discretion ...

Secondly I do will and bequeath unto my son John Alexander McLaren ... the whole of the real estate of which I may die possessed, and which I have heretofore bequeathed unto my wife during her lifetime [and] the rest of my personal estate what may remain at my said wife's death ... provided he will have maintained his majority ..."

In effect, Robert McLaren left his estate to the 'control' and 'use' of his widow, ensuring her support during her lifetime, but also to be managed by her, in trust, for his son, John A. McLaren.⁶⁰

Despite the loss of its founder, the McLaren Distillery at Perth continued to operate and indeed grow, under the capable ownership of his widow, Janet McLean-McLaren. The still license was held in 1850 and 1851 by Janet, then in 1852 by her brother, David McLean (1802-1862), and then, for a decade beginning in 1853, in the name of Robert Gemmell.

Robert Gemmell (1810-1894)⁶¹, in partnership with John Porter (c1795-1858) and Malcolm Cameron (1808-1876), had been a principle in the Perth based merchant house of Porter, Gemmell & Company until shortly before Cameron (founder of the *Perth Courier*) moved to Sarnia and the firm was dissolved in 1844. Gemmell became Deputy Sheriff of the County and then went to work for Robert McLaren and subsequently for Janet McLaren. Although the *Canada Directory 1856-1858* lists Gemmell as the "*Proprietor*" of the Perth Distillery, he was more accurately managing the business for inheritor Janet McLaren. The *Leeds, Grenville, Lanark & Renfrew Directory* of the following year lists Gemmell as one of three distillers working at Perth, the others being John Campbell⁶² and William Canwith⁶³.

While the McLaren business grew overall, there was, however, some consolidation. Although it would take several years to find a buyer, in the summer of 1850 the original McLaren distillery at Plumb Point was advertised for sale.

Auction Sale – On Friday the 20th September next, the Executors of the late Robert McLaren offer for sale the following property, viz: - Distillery and Utensils, all in good order. Lots 15 & 16 in the 6th Concession of the Township of Elmsley, known as Plumb Point. Also, a quantity of Barley and Firewood will be disposed of by private sale. Sale commences at 12 o'clock at the Distillery. N.B. - All debts due to the above Estate and

⁶⁰ Executors of the will were his wife Janet McLean-McLaren, distillery employee Robert Gemmell and brother-in-law William Ruddesdale.

⁶¹ Son of James Gemmell (1770-1844) and Elizabeth Gilmore (1751-1840). In 1835 he married Johanna Lees (1813-1893), daughter of William Lees Sr. (1783-1843) and Barbara Tait (1788-1868). Johanna Lees, not Elizabeth Hughes (1812-1904), was the true subject of the affections of John Wilson (1807-1869), victor of the 'Last Fatal Duel', but in the scandal following his killing of Robert Lyons (1812-1833) her father forbade Lees from having anything to do with John Wilson, and Wilson later married Hughes.

⁶² Probably associated with the Ferguson Distillery.

⁶³ William Canwith/Carnwith worked at the Spalding & Stewart Distillery. He and his wife Mary Thornton emigrated from Kilkenny, Ireland and settled at Perth in 1825. They were the parents of 12 children, the tenth of these, a son named William Spalding Canwith/Carnwith (1856-1857), named in honor of his father's employer.

remaining unpaid at the day of sale, will be handed over for collection; and all debts due by the Estate will be paid on demand.

*- Janet McLaren - Robert Gemmell - Wm. Ruddesdale*⁶⁴

In 1852, widow Janet McLean-McLaren was remarried to John Ferguson (1793-1854)⁶⁵. Ferguson died just two years later, and she was married for a third time to James Templeton (1804-1882)⁶⁶ in August 1860. Only eight months later Janet contracted diphtheria while nursing a sick niece and died, on April 19, 1861. Janet McLean-McLaren-Ferguson-Templeton had no children by any of her three marriages, although she had been the mother of one illegitimate child, the stillborn infant of 1827, and had raised stepson, John A. McLaren.

John A. McLaren -

Arriving from his birth-mother's home in McNab Township, Renfrew County, at about the age of three or four years, John A. was raised at Perth by his father, Robert, and stepmother, Janet McLean-McLaren, and educated in the local public-school system.

There is also an account that "... *in his younger days, he spent a number of years in Scotland touring individual distilleries learning their methods of making malt whiskey*"⁶⁷ and that he had "*walked the distilleries of Scotland, learning their methods*"⁶⁸. This tale of a study-trip to Scotland is almost certainly mythical and rooted in nothing more than an 1878 promotional article John A. placed in the *Montreal Commercial Review*, wherein he claimed that he had "... *learnt the secrets of the art [of distilling] from the oldest experienced distillers in Great Britain*". In promoting his business and product, John A. would always favour hyperbole and often treated facts as obstacles best circumvented in relating the better story he wanted to tell.

John A. was not involved in the family distillery business during the years it was owned by his stepmother and managed by Robert Gemmell. In the 1851 census he is enumerated, at age 20, as a "*clerk*" living with his widowed stepmother whose occupation is recorded as "*distiller*". In his teens John A. had gone to work for dry goods merchant George Kerr⁶⁹ and after that enterprise went bankrupt in June 1848⁷⁰ continued to work for the firm's reincarnation as Dawson Kerr & Company⁷¹, at 67 Foster Street⁷². From the shelves of the Kerr stores John A. McLaren sold;

⁶⁴ *Bathurst Courier*, July 26, 1850. Robert Gemmell worked at the distillery for about four years before Robert McLaren's death. William Ruddesdale was Janet McLean-McLaren's brother-in-law, a sibling to Ellen Ruddesdale who was married to Janet McLean-McLaren's brother William McLean.

⁶⁵ John Ferguson had been previously twice married, to Jane Montgomery (1800-1824) and Isabella Grey (1797-1851). He should not be confused with distiller John Ferguson (1780-1857).

⁶⁶ Templeton was proprietor of G. & J. Templeton Tannery on Herriott Street, a property later occupied by James Brothers Foundry on the site currently occupied by the Post Office. James Templeton had been previously married to Margaret Mclquham (1812-1855).

⁶⁷ *Whiskey & Wickedness: The Rideau Military Settlements 1816-1875*, by Larry D. Cotton

⁶⁸ *Perth Courier*, Centenary Edition, August 3, 1934.

⁶⁹ *Perth Courier*, December 13, 1901.

⁷⁰ *Bathurst Courier*, June 30, 1848 & December 7, 1849.

⁷¹ Dawson Kerr (1819-1898) was also the one-time publisher of the *Ottawa Advocate*, and of the *Volunteer Review*, at Bytown and the owner of a printing and book binding business.

⁷² Now 'Shadowfax' clothing store.

Tea, Salt, Sugar, Tobaccos, Blankets, Flannels, Boots, Shoes, Buck Mitts, Moccasins, Buffalo Robes, Furs, Gloves, Hosiery, Millinery, Oils, Paints, Patent Medicines, French Perfumery, Hardware, Nails, Window Glass, Grindstones, General Groceries and Fine Fat Labrador Herring – For Cash Only.⁷³

John A. spent more than a decade working for Dawson Kerr & Company, an apprenticeship that taught him much about sound business practice and showed him the possibilities of the mercantile trade at a time when Perth's economy received a significant boost with the arrival of a spur line of the Brockville & Ottawa (B&O) Railway in 1859.

In late 1863, age 32, he opened his own general store. Advertised as “*The New Store, Opposite the New Market*”⁷⁴ the enterprise was located in the stone building built by his father in 1848⁷⁵ at what is now 81 Gore Street East. ‘The New Store’ offered;

Overcoatings, Canadian Tweeds, Scotch Tweeds, Plain & Fancy Flannels, Grey Cottons, Bleached Cottons, Striped Shirtings, Prints, Winceys & Dress goods, Ladies Felt Hats & Feathers, Balmoral Skirting, Garabaldis, Nubias, Scarfs, Kit Mitts, Teas, Sugars, Tobaccos, General Groceries, Labrador Split Herring, White Granite Dinner Dishes, Beautiful China Tea Sets, Glassware, &c., &c., &c.

The subscriber is determined to carry out the Ready-Pay System to the letter – to keep the best of everything in his line – and to sell at the Very Lowest Possible Prices.

-John A. McLaren

Taking an interest in local politics, John A. won the Center Ward seat on Perth Town Council for the 1865 term by acclamation. He may not have been the most popular or effective of councilors, however, as in 1866 he was re-elected by a margin of only 10 votes and then chose not to seek re-election in 1867. Nearly two decades later, however, he was elected a Perth Board of Education Trustee in 1884 and, for the next 17 years, sat on either the board or on its Public School Contingent Committee.

John A. regularly advertised his business in the *Perth Courier* as ‘The New Store’ until April 1867 when he took on a business partner and the establishment was re-branded as “*The Cheap Store, Opposite the Market*”.

⁷³ Dawson Kerr & Company Advertisement, *Perth Courier*, January 1860.

⁷⁴ *Perth Courier*, December 1863.

⁷⁵ Robert McLaren died in November 1848, just six months after he purchased the plot on which the store stood. It seems likely his wife Janet McLean-McLaren was probably responsible for completing construction of the facility

The Latest News – New Business Firm – McLaren and Urquhart – The subscribers have entered into co-partnership and intend pushing the mercantile business of this place with increased vigor. They are now laying in the largest and most choice selection of dry goods, groceries and liquors ever brought to this place. They are ‘reorganizing’ their whole establishment and fitting it up with all the latest improvements that they may enjoy every facility for supplying the public with Dry Goods and Groceries upon the very best terms.

Like all new beginners, the one object above all others, they are in hot pursuit of, is Success In Business. To attain which they propose keeping The Very Best Goods and selling them For Less Money than they can be got for anywhere else. They will be ready at all times freely to show their goods and the Lowest Price will be named at once whereby it will be rendered with a Pleasure and a Profit to do business at their establishment.

N.B. – Purchases sent home on all occasions to parties living in town.

Terms Cash! One Price Only!

– John A. McLaren, D. W. Urquhart.⁷⁶

That John A.’s primary business was that of a general merchant nearly five years after the death of his stepmother, when ownership of his late father’s distillery and other business interests should have passed to him, was the result of Janet McLaren’s blatant attempt to subvert the terms of her husband’s will of 1847. Rather than comply with terms under which she had received Robert McLaren’s estate (essentially in trust for John A.), Janet’s own 1861 will bequeathed all of her late husband’s property to various members of the McLean and Coombs families, with the exception of one small piece of land on Warf Street left to John A. Only through a series of hard-fought lawsuits between 1861 and 1869 did John A. manage to overturn his mother’s will and, piece by piece, recover most of his inheritance.

It was not until November of 1865, when he was 34 years of age and still operating ‘The New Store’, that his first active involvement in the distillery is indicated by advertisements placed in the *Perth Courier* offering “cash paid for barley”; and it was not until March 1866 that John A. announced his full takeover of the distillery by advertising,

Pure Malt Whiskey for sale at The Perth Distillery. The subscriber is working the Distillery, lately occupied by Mr. Gemmell, and as “a new broom sweeps clean” the public may expect that, for a time at all events, things will be done up in good style, and all who like “a drap o’ guid drink” will do well to patronize the Old Stand. – John A. McLaren.⁷⁷

Even as he assumed control of the distillery, John A. maintained his partnership with Donald William Urquhart (1843-1872) in the mercantile trade⁷⁸ until April 1868 when the following ‘card’ appeared in the local newspaper.

⁷⁶ *Perth Courier*, April 19, 1867.

⁷⁷ *Perth Courier*, March 23, 1866.

⁷⁸ Dissolution of the partnership with Donald Urquhart, and the sale of their business to Gamsby, probably had much to do with Urquhart’s ill health. He died of tuberculosis at Kingston four years later in 1872.

Mr. John A. McLaren begs to announced that he is about retiring from the mercantile business and has disposed of his whole stock-in-trade to Mr. G. A. Gamsby⁷⁹. Mr. McLaren would not be conforming to the established conventions of society if he did not, on this occasion, “tender his sincere thanks to his friends and the public generally for the very liberal patronage bestowed upon him since he commenced business in this place”. He now does so in the words of the old and established formula – not merely as matter of form, however, but with that degree of feeling which the large share of patronage he received ought to prompt.

It is with no small degree of reluctance that Mr. McLaren quits the store business, and the large run of trade which in a few years he succeeded in building up, and his only reason for doing so is that he proposes going more extensively into the Distillery Business, and in that case could not give the store that attention which it ought to have.

- John A. McLaren⁸⁰

Important To Some – The subscriber hereby gives notice to all parties who were owing him at the time of his entering into partnership with Mr. Urquhart (now nearly twelve months since) and who have not yet paid up, that unless they do so by the First Day of April next, their accounts will, every one, be handed over for collection.

- John A. McLaren⁸¹

When John A. took over the McLaren Distillery in 1865 the temperance-supporting *Perth Courier* published a back-handed announcement of the change of ownership.

It would be a painful thing to see the Courier praising anybody’s whiskey and as we have no desire to inflict pain on anybody, we have no intention of praising anybody’s whiskey. We merely wish to announced that John A. ... not John A. of Kingston, for by all accounts he’d rather drink whiskey than make it, but John A. of Perth, who’d rather sell it than drink it ... has commenced business as a Distiller in the place occupied by Mr. Gemmell.

... we have not personally drank any of Mr. McLaren’s whiskey, but from those of our friends who did drink it, we learn that it will set a man drunk as quickly as any another whiskey in the country. As getting drunk is the only sensible object a man can have in view of drinking whiskey, we would advise all sensible men in this locality who do drink whiskey, to try how soon they can get jolly on that of Mr. McLaren’s manufacture. We have no doubt that they would be perfectly satisfied with the result and have as little headache left as could be reasonably expected.⁸²

In 1868 John A. was joined at the distillery by his brother-in-law, 28-year-old Robert Stewart (1840-1922). Stewart had been born in Dunkeld, Perthshire, Scotland, the son of John Stewart (1799-1850) and Jean Hendry (1795-1875), and emigrated to Canada at a young age⁸³.

⁷⁹ Guy Aylwin Gamsby (1842-1904) married 'Kate' Amelia Radenhurst (1846-1872) and then Helen Campbell (b.1863). Gamsby had formerly operated a pharmacy at Perth. He ran the former McLaren dry goods business until 1885 when he went bankrupt.

⁸⁰ *Perth Courier*, April 1868.

⁸¹ *Perth Courier*, May 15, 1868.

⁸² *Perth Courier*, December 15, 1865.

⁸³ Stewart may have emigrated with relatives, but his parents remained in Scotland.

He arrived in Renfrew County in 1852 and in about 1863 married John A.'s half-sister Barbara Cameron (1842-1906), the daughter of John Cameron and John A.'s birth-mother, Elizabeth Alexander. Robert Stewart and Barbara Cameron were the parents of three children;

- Janet Douglas Stewart (1864-1946), married George Richard William Rogers (1862-1943)
- John Alexander Stewart (1867-1922), married Jessie Mable Henderson (1868-1956)
- Cameron Robertson Stewart (1870-1927), married Margaret Victoria Cooderham (1865-1952)

Robert Stewart has been described as a 'partner' in the McLaren distilling firm but, while he played a significant role in company operations for a decade, he learned the distilling business from John A. and there is no evidence he held any financial interest in the venture.

In 1871, five years after assuming control of his father's distillery, John A. McLaren produced 5,000 gallons (22,730 Liters) of malt whiskey, but then the 'new broom' swept it all away. In 1871-1872 the building on Market Square that had housed his father's distillery was torn down. It was replaced by a stone structure 120 feet long and three storeys high, equipped with improved machinery, a steam engine, and a boiler to better satisfy increasing demand. In addition to the distillery the new facility included a brewery and customers were assured of,

*... ale of superior quality, fully equal to Labatt's or Dow's; and to attain this result no pains or expense will be spared by Mr. McLaren in the way either of management or manufacturing apparatus.*⁸⁴

From the day Robert McLaren purchased Henry Graham's tub still in 1831, and especially from the founding of McLaren's Distillery 10 years later, the McLaren name had signified quality whiskey. That legacy was honored and sustained by John A. when he incorporated the most modern equipment⁸⁵, processes and practices in his new plant.

Although his stills had an output capacity of hundreds of gallons per day, they were operated only in fall and winter when low temperatures mitigated against outside contamination carried by flies or other vermin. Unlike the rest of Ontario's distilleries that used high yielding corn as the alcohol source, McLaren's used only local barley. As the process began, the grain was soaked for several days in vats of Tay River water, then spread on a bed of fine mesh above low-pressure steam vents and tended 24 hours per day until it began to sprout. McLaren prided himself on the contribution the clarity and composition of Tay River water made to the distinctive taste of his product.

The sprouting grain was next placed in a drying kiln to stop the germination process. Kiln heat was generated by wood fires, whereas in Scotland or Ireland it would have come from burning peat. At McLaren's the wood fires added further to the unique flavour for which the distillery became famous.

⁸⁴ *Whiskey & Wickedness*, by Larry D. Cotton, quoting a *Perth Courier* advertisement.

⁸⁵ For example, the wooden vats were imported from Chicago.

The dried grain was then ground, and the grist poured into big tubs of warmed Tay water, “which is, owing to its freedom from hardness, specially adapted to this purpose”⁸⁶, creating the ‘mash’. After stirring for several hours, the ‘wort’ was drawn off from the bottom, placed in a wooden tank, yeast added, and left to ferment for two to three days. The resulting ‘wash’ was poured into the copper still where, as the condensate formed in the coils, it passed through fine filters woven from the tail hair of white horses. The captured liquid went into wood barrels in the bond room. At a time when most competitors produced their whiskey in just three days, the McLaren process took 30 days. Other distilleries also frequently sold whiskey still warm from the still, or after aging for only a few days or weeks, but most McLaren product was aged in the barrel for years. In 1884 he advertised,

*Rare Old Whiskey – Upwards of 20,000 gallons on hand in the vaults of the Perth Distillery, being an accumulation of balances from different seasons made during the last 20 years. As a tonic and stimulant this whiskey has no parallel – John A. McLaren, Perth Distillery, Perth, Ont.*⁸⁷



At the end of the process, in true ‘waste-not-want-not’ Scots fashion, the depleted mash was taken from the tubs to a feedlot behind the distillery⁸⁸ where a herd of steers was fattened for market. On shipping day, Perth experienced its own version of Pamplona’s ‘running of the bulls’ as 50 or more steers, weighing up to 700 kilos (1,500 lbs.) each, were driven through town streets to stock pens at the CPR rail yard. “Every pedestrian took to the housetops or the fences and gave the ‘noble chaps’ the clear right of way.”⁸⁹

In the late 1830s McLaren whiskey destined for Montreal and beyond was shipped by barge down the Tay Canal. When that canal ceased to function from lack of maintenance, wagons carried the whiskey barrels to Oliver’s Landing (Rideau Ferry) for loading aboard Rideau Canal steamboats. After the Brockville & Ottawa (B&O) Railway reached Perth in 1859 whiskey exports went by rail.

In the 1870s and 1880s John A. lived in an apartment in the building housing his former store, on the corner of Basin and Gore Streets. Then in 1894 “Arthur McCann sold his house and lot on Wilson Street, bought by him from the late Mrs. McDonagh, at \$925 to John A. McLaren”⁹⁰. His new home, where he would live for the remainder of his life, was located on the South Side of Wilson Street, near the Mary Street intersection, a property now part of the Stewart Public School playground.⁹¹

⁸⁶ *Montreal Commercial Review*, August 3, 1878.

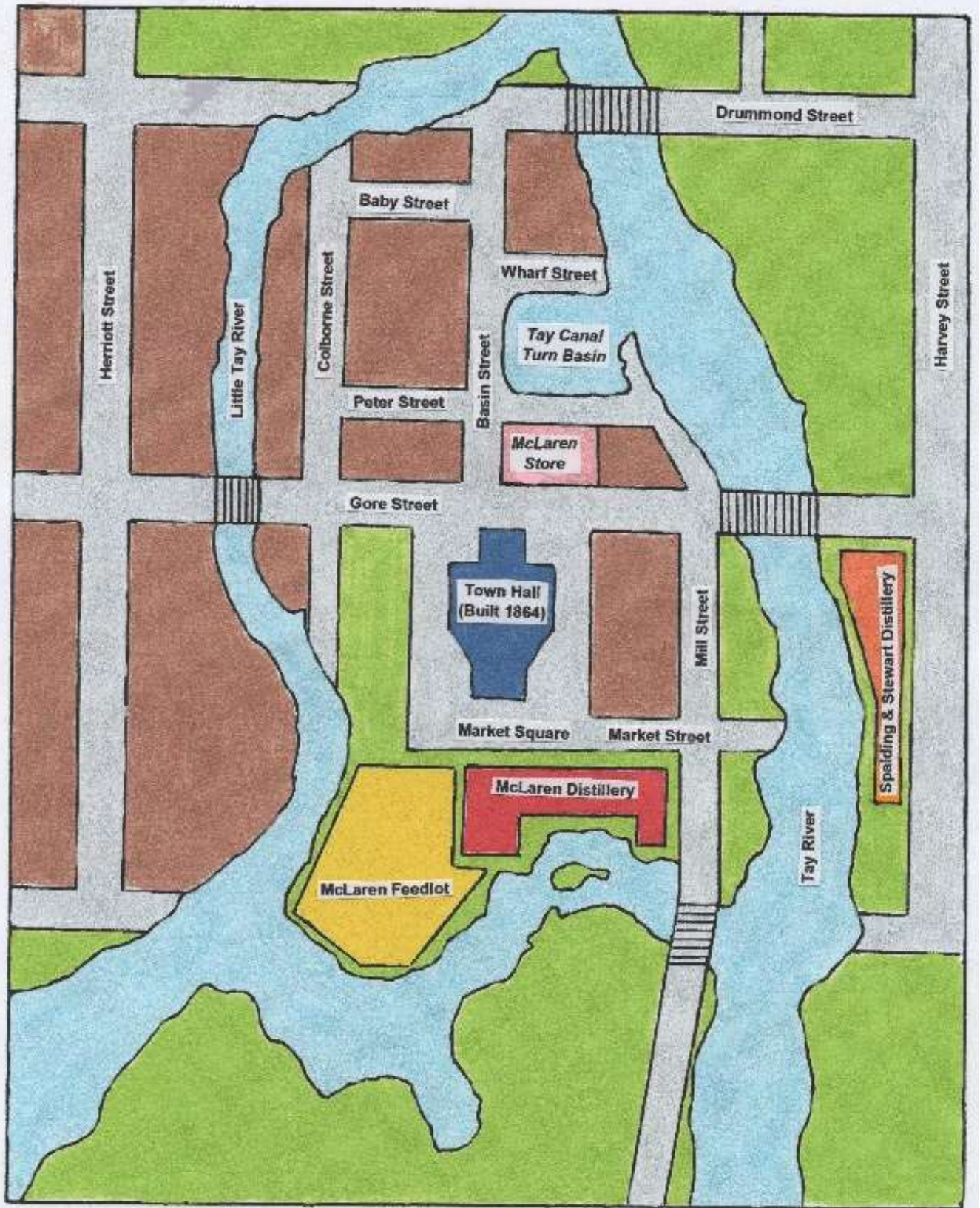
⁸⁷ *Counties of Carleton, Lanark, Prescott, Russel & Ottawa Directory, 1884* – published by O. L. Fuller, Montreal.

⁸⁸ Now Stewart Park.

⁸⁹ *Whiskey & Wickedness*, by Larry D. Cotton.

⁹⁰ *Perth Courier*, March 2, 1894.

⁹¹ In an earlier age this property was a ‘park lot’ granted to soldier-settler Lieutenant Anthony Leslie of the 8th Regiment of Foot and Glengarry Light Infantry, one of the first Magistrates appointed for the District of Bathurst and later the local agent of the Commercial Bank of the Midland District.



Cockburn Island, Perth

Although John A. never married and, with reference to his illegitimate birth, considered himself “*an unfortunate child*”⁹², he was in fact part of a large and mostly close-knit family of half-siblings and many nephews and nieces, some of whom he helped raise.

*McLaren had a great affection for his half-sister Jessie, who had married a man named Stewart, and upon her death [he] brought her three children to stay with him in Perth, and always maintained interest in them.*⁹³

At Renfrew, in 1864, his half-sister Janet ‘Jennie’ Cameron (1839-1973) married Alexander Stewart Jr. (1837-1918), born at Dunkeld, Perthshire, Scotland, the son of Alexander Stewart Sr. (1809-1875) and Janet Douglas (1810-1895)⁹⁴. They had three children, Aleck D. (b.1868), Frank C. (b.1870) and Jennie A. (1872-1922), before Janet/Jennie died in 1873 at Cleveland⁹⁵, Ohio, where her husband worked as a carpenter. The children, all under the age of five years, were brought to Perth where their care was assured by John A. until about 1880 when Alexander Stewart was remarried to Margaret McIntyre (1847-1931)⁹⁶ of Balderson and the family returned to live in Ohio.

Testimony given during the court battle over John A.’s will repeatedly demonstrated his warm affection for family members; but his lawyer, John A. Stewart (1867-1922), whom he always called ‘Jack’, was clearly the favourite nephew. He was the son of John A.’s half-sister Barbara Cameron (1842-1906) who, in 1853, had married Robert Stewart (1840-1922), the man who later worked at the McLaren distillery. McLaren told anyone who would listen that Jack Stewart was the best lawyer in Perth and in his summation of witness testimony Justice Hugh McMahon wrote that John A.,

*... retained the highest regard for Jack Stewart. McLaren was proud of the plaintiff and expressed his satisfaction at Jack having proved such a success in his profession and was much gratified at his occupying the position of Mayor of the town. To one of the witnesses he expressed the opinion that Jack possessed the brains of the Town Council.*⁹⁷

Justice McMahon’s summation went on to note that;

In respect to [nephew] Hugh Cameron [1835-1910], the evidence is that McLaren had great regard for him, and in 1901 conveyed the [Horton Township] homestead farm to him.

Mr. McLaren was fond of Hugh Cameron’s children and had kept them for a time at his place when they were young.

⁹² *Perth Courier*, May 28, 1902, quoting a comment made to long-time employee Frank S. Walker.

⁹³ *Perth Courier*, July 25, 1902.

⁹⁴ Alexander Stewart Jr. (1837-1918) was probably a close relative of Robert Stewart (1840-1922) who married John A.’s half sister Barbara Cameron, he was not a brother but very likely a cousin. Robert and Barbara Stewart named their eldest child and only daughter Janet Douglas Stewart (1864-1946).

⁹⁵ There is a record of Janet/Jennie Cameron-Stewart having been buried at Cleveland Heights United Presbyterian Church in 1873. Her body may have been later returned to Canada and placed in the McLaren-Stewart Mausoleum, built 40 years later (1913) at Elmwood Cemetery, as she is memorialized on the end-plate of one of the eight crypts in the mausoleum. The same end-plate, however, also memorializes her sister Isabella Cameron (1837-1873), who died at Perth, suggesting the occupant may actually be Isabella and that Janet/Jennie’s is only memorialized in the mausoleum and her remains are still in Cleveland.

⁹⁶ She does not appear to have been related to John A.’s half-sister Elizabeth Cameron-McIntyre who destroyed his will.

⁹⁷ *Perth Courier*, July 25, 1902.

McLaren was fond of Barbara Stewart ... and according to the evidence of Barbara herself, and those witnesses having the best opportunity of knowing his feelings, he was very fond of her and always called her his sister.

McLaren thought his nephew Alexander McNab [1869-1957]⁹⁸, a young man of promise, and desired to help him.⁹⁹

John A.'s generosity also reached beyond blood relations. At the time of his death the *Perth Courier*, said he was "... one of the most generous men in Perth [and] the number of poor people who were succored from his store of wealth was known to none but himself".¹⁰⁰

One such beneficiary was Mary 'Minnie' Gertrude Hamilton (1877-1920), the daughter of Charles Hamilton (1832-1890) and Mary Ann Fournier (1839-1921). The number of "succored poor" may have been unknown, but Minnie's long-standing relationship with McLaren was no secret to anyone. As the hunt for his missing will hung in the balance, local gossip speculated that Minnie had become John A.'s mistress and (somehow) stood to inherit his entire fortune.

The truth was more prosaic. The relationship seems to have formed when McLaren began providing for the entire Hamilton family¹⁰¹ on the death of Minnie's father in 1890. In his finding Justice McMahan noted that John A. had continued to help her family,

... generously paying the funeral expenses when one of her sisters died and paying the doctor's bills incurred during the fatal illness of her two sisters and brother.

In Miss Hamilton he had always shown an unmistakable interest, a favorite and an almost constant companion ... ever since she was seven years old. [He] provided her with pocket money [and] paid any bills that she contracted. He told her he kept a pass-book in which he had entered all the money paid her, and that she would be shocked if she knew the amount. In McLaren's safe there was also ... a photograph of her. She was quite a favorite of his and he had shown her many evidences of kindness and had once said to her: "Do not trouble yourself, you are provided for".¹⁰²

Minnie Hamilton was 24 years of age when 70-year-old McLaren died in 1901, and there is no evidence of a sexual relationship. Minnie seems to have been the daughter that John A. never had.¹⁰³

As the McLaren Distillery hit its full stride in the mid-1870s John A.'s advertising promoted his product as an elixir so fine that it won endorsement from even the medical profession.

⁹⁸ Son of John A.'s sister Marion Cameron (1834-1875) and John McNab (1821-1874).

⁹⁹ *Perth Courier*, July 25, 1902.

¹⁰⁰ *Perth Courier*, December 13, 1901.

¹⁰¹ Charles and Mary Hamilton were the parents of five children; George Henry (1870-1916), Elizabeth (b.1873), Charles (1874-1901), Minnie (1877-1920), Hattie (1880-1901), Mary (1884-1885).

¹⁰² *Perth Courier*, May 28, 1902.

¹⁰³ In the *1898-1899 Perth Directory* Minnie Hamilton is shown resident on Gore Street East, opposite the Methodist Church, at the same address as her sister Elizabeth 'Lizzie' Hamilton, an employee of the Code's Mill.

MALT WHISKEY is decidedly the Liquor to use when ardent spirits of any kind are required. The subscriber continues to manufacture the GENUINE USQUEBAUGH¹⁰⁴ or SMALL STILL WHISKEY, so celebrated in Scotland and Ireland. This 'Small Still Whiskey', as it is called in the Old County, has not lost any of its celebrity at the present day. An eminent scientist, Edward Smith, M.D., L.L.B., F.R.S¹⁰⁵, fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of London, writing in the 'International Scientific Series', now in course of publication, speaks of it thus: -

"The Small Still Whiskey has always been regarded as the better kind, in reference to flavor, and in having less of the acrid essential oils which cause so much irritation in the throat and stomach when the spirit is drunk without or with very little water. No one can have travelled in the hills of Scotland or Ireland without being sensible that he could drink whisky with an impunity which would be perfectly impossible in the Lowlands or in England ... and even Ladies relish the whiskey and water which is handed to them several times a day after a long walk in Scotland, or after exposure to the drenching rains of Ireland."

This is the kind of whiskey the subscriber makes, and having given the subject his closest attention, he does not hesitate to say that what he produces is quite equal to anything to be had either in Scotland or Ireland. Go to any Liquor dealer and ask for – McLAREN'S MALT WHISKEY

John A. McLaren¹⁰⁶

In the *Lanark County Directory 1881-1882* the entry for McLaren's Perth Distillery further assured customers that their "*Old Fashioned Small Still Whisky, So Celebrated In Scotland and Ireland [was] Warranted Free from Fusil Oil*". Bottle labels made the same assurance and elsewhere McLaren bragged that "*there is not a headache in a barrel of it*".¹⁰⁷

In the August 1878 edition of the *Montreal Commercial Review* John A. promoted his product as the

*... celebrated brand of genuine Usquebaugh or small still whiskey which he distills exactly on the same principles as the well-celebrated Scotch and Irish whiskies of the same class, and which is imported to his country and sold at a very much higher figure than that which he can supply it direct from his distillery. This fine pure brand of whiskey is a stimulant more effective and is found from analysis to possess less injurious properties, than any strong liquor in the market ...*¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ The Scots and Irish Gaelic word for whiskey.

¹⁰⁵ Edward Smith, lover of malt whiskey, was a highly qualified man indeed, he held an MD (Doctor of Medicine), LLB (Law Degree), and was an FRS (Fellow of the Royal Society).

¹⁰⁶ *Perth Courier*, December 25, 1873.

¹⁰⁷ Fusel Oil, a mixture of several alcohols (chiefly amyl alcohol) produced as a by-product of alcoholic fermentation. The word 'Fusel' is German for 'bad liquor'. Whether fusel alcohol contributes to hangover symptoms or not is a matter of scientific debate.

¹⁰⁸ The article was authored by John A. McLaren himself and published under his by-line.

Partly to discourage adulteration of his whiskey by traders and tavern keepers, and partly to profit from the sale of liquors he did not himself produce, in 1878 McLaren secured a license allowing him to enter the retail market.

McLAREN's – PURE MALT WHISKEY – DIRECT FROM THE DISTILLERY – The subscriber has now a Shop License, which enables him to sell his whiskey in any quantity from THREE HALF PINTS upwards. He would respectfully call attention to his TODDY WHISKEY! which is of extra strength and being old and fine, is the most desirable for medicinal purposes and in all cases where stimulant is required.

He has now on hand and will for the future continue to keep in stock, a full assortment of FIRST-CLASS LIQUORS including HENNESSY'S BRANDY, DeKUYPER'S GIN, PURE JAMAICAN SPIRITIS, an ASSORTEMENT OF WINES and the best brands in HIGHWINES, PROOF & OLD RYE WHISKIES and ALCOHOL FOR DRUGGISTS.

Barrels, kegs and all sizes FOR SALE BUT NOT TO LEND.

Office and wareroom adjoining the distillery, where all orders during business hours will be promptly attended to.

- John A. McLaren¹⁰⁹

At about the time John A. opened his retail shop at Perth he became the first distiller in Canada¹¹⁰ to market his product in containers smaller than an earthenware jug or whatever personal receptacle a customer might provide. The earliest surviving McLaren glass bottles contained one Imperial quart (40 ounces or two pints). Shortly thereafter McLaren introduced a 10-imperial ounce (284 milliliter)¹¹¹ bottle that fit conveniently and discreetly in a pocket. That bottle came to be known as a 'mickey'. John A. McLaren is frequently credited with coining the term, one that is used/understood almost exclusively by Canadians.

¹⁰⁹ *Perth Courier*, February 15, 1878.

¹¹⁰ Whiskey was sold in the United States in 12-U.S. fluid ounce bottles before McLaren introduced the 'mickey' to Canada. The term 'mickey' is uniquely Canadian; created in Canada and used/understood almost exclusively by Canadians. Origin of the term is uncertain but may relate to the derogatory term of the day applied to the Irish, 'Mick', and allude to the stereotypical association of the Irish and whiskey drinking.

¹¹¹ Numerous sources cite the size of John A. McLaren's first 'Mickies' as 12 ounces (340.957 milliliter) but careful measurement of original McLaren Distillery bottles by collector Jim Winton, Perth, demonstrates that they contained 10 Imperial ounces.

USQUEBAUGH.

TRADE MARK.

PURE MALT Whisky
J.A. McLAREN
DISTILLER
PERTH ONT.

It is beginning to be understood, and is advocated by medical men, that in almost all cases where a stimulant is required, a GOOD OLD WHISKY is the best liquor to use. The subscriber being engaged in the manufacture of Whisky, is giving this class of liquor his special attention. In his own make of

Pure Malt Whisky,

Which is not surpassed by any, he has three different grades according to age and strength, which for convenience are designated—One Star (*); Two Star (**); and Three Star (***)]. With a view of having an assortment of the best Whiskies that are made he has added to his stock some of the most celebrated kinds. His stock now comprises the following choice Whiskies:—

McLaren's Pure Malt Whisky,
One Star (*)
Two Star (**)
Three Star (***)
Mitchell's Old Irish Whisky,
Glenlivet Scotch Whisky,
Kentucky Sour Mash Whisky,
Old Bourbon Whisky,
Gooderham & Worts' Old Rye,
Proof, and Family Proof Whiskies, High Wines, & Alcohol.
Also, all the best brands in Brandy, Gin, Rum and Wines.
Bottled Ale and Porter.
An assortment of Syrups, in cases and on draft, making the best collection of Liquors that can be got together.

Wholesale and Retail Warehouse—Adjoining the Perth Distillery where all orders during business hours will be promptly attended to. TERMS—CASH.

John A. McLaren.

When first introduced, a mickey of McLaren's finest 'Old Perth Malt Whiskey' sold for 90 cents, or 80 cents to customers who returned the bottle for a refill.



Also in 1878, after a decade at the McLaren distillery, John A.'s brother-in-law, Robert Stewart, defected to accept a partnership offered by brewer and distiller James Spalding Jr. (1855-1935). Spalding's father, James Sr. (1826-1906), had been involved in the William Locke (1800-1862) Brewery & Distillery¹¹² from the late 1850s. He took ownership of the company in the 1860s and then passed the firm to his son James Jr. in 1872. Although Spalding Jr. knew little or nothing about distilling whiskey, he converted the brewery into a distillery and, relying upon the expertise Robert Stewart brought with him from his years at McLaren's, reorganized the business as the Spalding & Stewart distilling company in 1879. Spalding & Stewart became nearly as famous for their brand-name 'Mountain Dew' and 'Old Perth' as John A. McLaren was for his Usquebaugh 'Pure Malt Whiskey', 'Perth Malt Whiskey V.V.O.'¹¹³ and 'Old Perth Malt Whiskey'.



Spalding & Stewart Distillery

John A. remained close to this sister Barbara, but his feelings toward her husband Robert Stewart were cool at best after the 1878 split. His business manager of nearly 20 years, Francis 'Frank' S. Walker (1856-1914), testified at the 1902 court hearing that John A. "*had little liking*" for Robert Stewart. For many years, McLaren and Spalding & Stewart operated the only two pot distilleries in Canada.

¹¹² Located at the corner of Gore and Harvey Streets the site had been the location of the 'King's Store' during the earliest days of the Perth Military Settlement. It was later purchased by merchant and MLA William Morris, who turned it into the distillery and brewery and later purchased by William Locke. In 1832 William Locke demolished the log building and replaced it with a structure of stone.

¹¹³ V.V.O. is apparently an abbreviation for 'Very Very Old'.

Family relations might remain cordial, but business was another matter entirely. For seven years, from 1895 through 1902 (a year after John A.'s death), the McLaren and Spalding & Stewart firms fought a legal battle over branding trademarks. John A. was of the opinion that Spalding & Stewart's label 'Old Perth' sailed too close in name to McLaren's previously established brand 'Old Perth Malt Whiskey'.¹¹⁴



In the late 19th century North America was a thirsty place. Through the 1890s the McLaren distillery produced about 13,000 gallons (60,000 Liters) of fine malt whiskey annually, marketing its product from coast to coast across Canada and exporting to the United States and beyond. In the same period Spalding and Stewart had an output of about 10,000 gallons (37,850 Liters) annually.



John A. McLaren's Perth Distillery

¹¹⁴ In the trademark dispute McLaren was represented by Perth lawyer Francis Alexander Hall (1843-1904) as his usual attorney, nephew John A. Stewart, recused himself in light of the fact Spalding & Stewart was run by his father.

Labor requirements at the McLaren Distillery fluctuated seasonally, and indeed day by day, but at the turn of the century a local directory shows there were at least a half-dozen full-time employees; “David and Michael Hogan of Mill Street; James and William King of Herriott Street; Richard Walker of Herriott Street”; and Frank S. Walker of Mill Street;¹¹⁵

By 1900 there were only three distilleries still functioning in Ontario; the malt whiskey distilleries of John A. McLaren and Spalding & Stewart at Perth and the rye whiskey distillery J. P. Wiser & Sons Ltd. of Prescott.¹¹⁶

John A. remained active in the day-to-day operations of his distillery until the end, but in the latter years of his life depended heavily on his manager Frank S. Walker. According to Walker, John A. was drinking “considerable liquor” and, with memory failing, “would put papers away and forget where he had placed them”.¹¹⁷ On December 7, 1901, at the age of 70, John A. suffered a stroke and died five days later. He was buried¹¹⁸ in Elmwood Cemetery in Plot A-38, but in 1913 his nephew John A. Stewart had a McLaren-Stewart family mausoleum constructed in the cemetery¹¹⁹ and John A.’s body was moved into one of its crypts beside his relatives;



McLaren-Stewart Mausoleum, Elmwood Cemetery

- Sister, Jennie Cameron-Stewart (1839-1873)
- Sister, Janet Douglas Cameron-Stewart (1864-1946) and her husband George William Rogers (1862-1943)
- Sister, Isabella Cameron (1837-1873)
- Sister, Barbara Cameron (1842-1906), her husband Robert Stewart (1840-1922) and their infant daughter Elizabeth Isabella Stewart (1872-1873)
- Nephew, Dr. Cameron R. Stewart (1870-1927) and his wife Margaret Victoria Cooderham (1865-1952).

¹¹⁵ *Perth Town Directory 1898-1899*. Also see *The Historical Geography of the Distilling Industry in Ontario: 1850-1900*, by Tanya Lynn MacKinnon, Master of Arts degree thesis, Wilfred Laurier University (2000).

¹¹⁶ Established in 1857 J.P. Wiser Ltd. was producing about 500,000 gallons of rye whiskey annually in 1900.

¹¹⁷ Testimony of his business manager Frank S. Walker, *Perth Courier*, May 28, 1902.

¹¹⁸ On December 14, 1901, probably in Plot -A38.

¹¹⁹ Section-B.

In eulogizing the man and his accomplishments, the local newspaper described John A. as “one of the keenest business men of Perth” who “accumulated wealth rapidly” to become the town’s “largest individual property holder [and] largest individual taxpayer”, in addition to his interests “in several hotel properties in other towns” and ownership of “the water power at Innisville”. More succinctly, John A. was the richest man in town by far. The newspaper further observed that while John A. was “possessed of a hot temper and an iron will”, he was also “one of the most generous men in Perth”.¹²⁰

Citing court testimony given by such leading citizens as MP John Haggart (1836-1913), Perth Postmaster Duncan Kippen (1830-1925), and Provincial Judges William Stevens Senkler (1838-1920)¹²¹ and Edward Elliott (1816-1905)¹²², men who had known McLaren for half a century, Justice Hugh McMahon wrote that John A. was particularly well known to be,

*... strictly truthful and honest. When he gave his word, it was always kept. He was one of the most trustworthy and reliable men one could meet. A very able man, with a keen analytical mind, well informed on most subjects. He had a strong will, was honest and truthful and one hard to influence ... a man who, when he once formed an opinion, was very difficult to change ... secretive and reserved [he] discussed his business or private matters with very few people.*¹²³

Unusual, and indeed remarkable, for its time, John A.’s obituary in the *Perth Courier* made no reference to his religious affiliation. In 1851, 1861 and 1871 he told census enumerators that he was an adherent of the “Church of Scotland”. By 1881, however, he aligned himself with the “Broad Church”¹²⁴ and in 1901 reported himself an “Agnostic”. When completing his death certificate a few months later however, when John A. could no longer be consulted, his nephew John A. Stewart denominated him a “Presbyterian” once again.¹²⁵

The Will -

John A. McLaren died not just rich, but very rich, leaving an estate then valued at \$120,000, or the equivalent of about \$3,250,000 today¹²⁶. Amassed and husbanded through astute and hardnosed business practice, his fortune demonstrated that John A. was no one’s fool in either commercial or private affairs and any effort to outsmart him in life was doomed to failure. Nevertheless, the temptation of so much money, combined with smouldering jealousy on the part of one family member, led to such an attempt once he was dead.

¹²⁰ Perth Courier, December 13, 1901.

¹²¹ Lanark County Judge.

¹²² Middlesex County Judge Edward Elliott qualified as a lawyer in the Perth law offices of W. O. Buell before starting his own law practice at Perth in partnership with W. R. Berford. At one point he and Berford also edited and managed the *Perth Expositor* newspaper. John A. McLaren’s nephew and lawyer John A. Stewart articulated with Judge Elliott and then practiced law in partnership with Elliot before joining J. M. Rogers in partnership.

¹²³ Justice McMahon’s final ruling reprinted in full in the *Perth Courier*, July 25, 1902.

¹²⁴ Collins English Dictionary defines a ‘Broad Church’ as any organization encompassing a wide range of opinions, beliefs or styles.

¹²⁵ John A. McLaren cannot be found in the Canadian census of Lanark County in 1891.

¹²⁶ 2019

Four years before his death John A. McLaren went to the law offices of Rogers¹²⁷ & Stewart and instructed his nephew and attorney, John A. Stewart, to draw up his will. Under the doctrine of 'filius nullius' ('nobody's son'), an element of British common law since medieval times, McLaren was a 'bastard' and, until passage of the *Ontario Legitimacy Act - 1961*, in the absences of a will illegitimate children could have "*no heirs except those of their body*". If they died without children and intestate (without a will) their property was considered *bona vacantia* (ownerless goods) and would escheat (revert) to the Crown. John A. clearly understood his status in law as a childless bastard. As such an "*unfortunate child*" he regarded Ontario's "*succession duties law as unfair, [and] did not propose to permit the government to acquire any of his property*"¹²⁸. His will was signed and duly witnessed on June 25, 1897. John A. kept the original copy of that will in his own possession, while John A. 'Jack' Stewart placed an unsigned copy in his law office files.

On Saturday December 7th, as news of John A.'s stroke spread through Perth and beyond, word reached his half-sister, Elizabeth 'Eliza' Cameron-McIntyre¹²⁹, in Horton Township, Renfrew County. By the following Monday she was at John A.'s bedside in Perth, and then, on the night of his passing, she purloined and broke open the valise where his most important personal papers were kept, stole his will and, shocked at its contents, in her own words, sent it "*up in smoke*".¹³⁰

In the days and weeks following John A.'s death, John Stewart (estate executor), Frank S. Walker (distillery business manager), George Rogers¹³¹ (Stewart's brother-in-law), and other family members and employees, repeatedly searched for the original signed copy of the will, turning out the iron safe, desks, cupboards and shelves at the distillery, and every closet, shelf, box, trunk, cubby-hole, and the broken valise at John A.'s house, all to no avail.

Even as this hunt was underway Eliza McIntyre told her sister Barbara Cameron-Stewart and niece Janet Stewart-Rogers that Jack Stewart "*need not look for the will, he won't get it*" and tapped her bosom. "*Do you hear that? I have got all John A.'s private papers there. I've got now what I'll master you Stewarts with for the rest of your lives, and you will not get a dollar of John A.'s money if I can help it*".¹³² She went on to tell the Stewart women, and at least three others, that John A.'s will had "*gone up in smoke*".

Despite Eliza's claim to have burned the will, John Stewart did not initially believe that she would have done something so counter to her own interests; concluding that she "*was not in a frame of mind to permit of her talking rationally*"¹³³. When days of searching still found nothing, however, Stewart hired a detective, one Miss Nesbitt, who spent several weeks investigating Eliza McIntyre. Detective Nesbitt did not find the will either, and could only report that according to Eliza "*if there had been a will in the valise, Mr. [John A.] Stewart had taken it*".¹³⁴ Nesbitt further reported that Eliza had upped the ante and was also making accusations of criminal negligence or possibly

¹²⁷ John A. Stewart practiced law in partnership with Joseph McKenzie Rogers (1859-1908).

¹²⁸ *Perth Courier*, May 28, 1902. Sworn testimony of License Inspector John McCann recalling a conversation with John A.

¹²⁹ In 1860 Eliza had married Duncan McIntyre (1833-1916) at Renfrew and was the mother of seven children.

¹³⁰ See court case reporting by *Perth Courier*, May 9, May 28, Jul 11, July 18, July 25, 1902.

¹³¹ In 1901 a hardware merchant, then local Postmaster 1925-1933.

¹³² Justice McMahon's ruling, *Perth Courier*, July 25, 1902.

¹³³ *Perth Courier*, May 28, 1902.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*.

murder, by stating that, “she believed in her heart that the medicine the nurse gave Mr. McLaren finished him”.¹³⁵

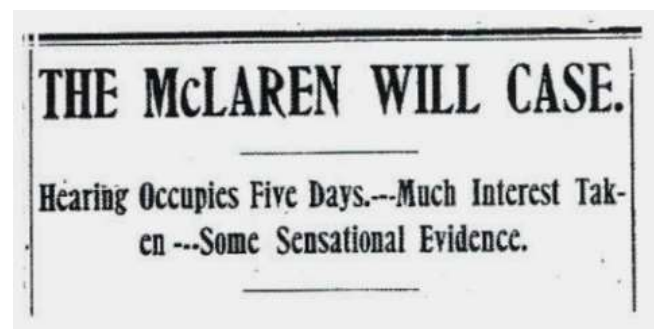
Why Eliza McIntyre torched John A.’s will has never been fully explained. In part, that her sister’s family, the Perth Stewarts, were much wealthier than her own family seems to have bred resentment and jealousy. Court testimony showed that even before the affair of John A.’s will, Eliza McIntyre “had a grudge against the Stewart family and she was prepared to take extreme steps to prevent them from getting anything out of the McLaren estate”¹³⁶. Well before John A. fell ill, she told her sister, Barbara Cameron-Stewart that “if the Stewarts were building on benefitting by his property they would be greatly mistaken”.¹³⁷



Eliza was, to some extent, mentally unbalanced and her state of mind was not improved when she read the will’s contents. Attorney George H. Watson, K.C., a Toronto based lawyer, acting for John A. Stewart, suggested mental incompetence when he politely, if awkwardly, described McIntyre as “visionary and fanciful ... on account of a lack of capacity of coherence”¹³⁸. Eliza later told the court that she had “considered that Mr. McLaren thought more of her than he did of the Stewarts”, but discovered that, while the will did provide bequests for herself, her siblings and a few others, the greater part of the estate by far had been left to her nephew John A. Stewart, son of her sister Barbara Cameron-Stewart. Eliza had three sons of her own, none of whom

were named in the will. Her own substantial bequest of “\$1,500 and \$30 per month for the remainder of her life” she seems to have regarded as a paltry insult. Eliza McIntyre had, for some reason, imagined herself the primary inheritor of her half-brother John A. McLaren.¹³⁹

In the witness box McIntyre denied all her earlier statements about stealing John A.’s papers and burning the will. “I did not burn or destroy any will of Mr. McLaren’s for I never had any ...” she told the court. “I never saw or had the private papers of J. A. McLaren”. Then, while questioning whether there had ever been a will, “I cannot say whether he made a will or not”, she said she believed John A. “was on bad terms with Mr. [John A.] Stewart”, claimed he had told her that “Mr. Stewart would not draw a pen over paper for him” and had said that “he knew enough about a will to draw one up without the assistance of Johnny Stewart”.



¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Quoted from witness testimony as reported by the *Perth Courier* May 28, 1902.

¹³⁷ *Perth Courier* May 28, 1902.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ No doubt in an effort to ingratiate herself with John A. she named a son born in 1881 McLaren Lloyd McIntyre. Unfortunately, the child died at the age of two years.

Eliza also claimed that “*Mr. McLaren did not like John A. Stewart. Mr. McLaren told me that John A. Stewart would not get much when he dropped off and that he would arrange that the Stewarts would not handle a cent of his money*”. She also asserted that her brother, John A., did not make any will such as that entered into evidence by her nephew John A. Stewart. In the discovery phase she had told the examiner that she believed “*ten thousand dollars and the place I am living on were to be given me*” and, much to the amusement of the packed courtroom, she told Justice McMahon that “*all she wanted out of the estate was \$25,000, the Leslie [Wilson Street] property, the distillery and the store opposite the post office*”,¹⁴⁰ i.e. essentially the entire estate.

Later in her testimony, in seeming to admit that there had been a will after all, Eliza said, “*I think that George A. Rogers helped John A. Stewart remove the papers, they stole the will*”. For good measure she denied ever telling Detective Nesbitt she “*believed in her heart*” that the nurse had finished-off John A. When challenged with the multitude of contradictions among statements she made at the time of John A.’s death, answers given to the pre-trial discovery examiner and testimony given in court, Eliza mystified cross-examining attorney Samuel Hume Blake (1835-1914)¹⁴¹ by stating that “*What I am telling you today is the true story. Which is better; not to tell the truth or to tell a lie?*”¹⁴² Blake pondered that moral philosophy challenge for a moment and then “*promised to take the question into his consideration and to write her a letter on it*”.¹⁴³

Eliza McIntyre’s version of events was contradicted in almost every detail by the evidence of more than a dozen other witnesses excepting one, John A.’s former housekeeper, a Mrs. Ferguson¹⁴⁴. She confirmed much of Eliza’s testimony, claiming that John A. had told her “*the Stewarts would never handle a dollar of his money*”, that he had called John A. Stewart “*a bit of a schoolboy*” and said “*he would never allow Mr. Stewart to put pen to paper to draw up a will for him*”.¹⁴⁵ Mrs. Ferguson’s credibility was destroyed, however, when it emerged that in exchange for her support, Eliza McIntyre had promised to give her “*one of the small houses*”¹⁴⁶ when she inherited John A.’s properties.

Justice McMahon final judgement was the epitome of understatement when he said of Eliza; “*I consider that where she thought her own interest would be served thereby, she would not hesitate in telling an untruth*”¹⁴⁷.

Elizabeth Cameron-McIntyre was an unbalanced, bitter woman, and a liar, but it seems unlikely she would have gone so far as to destroy the will had she understood estate law as it then applied to those of illegitimate birth. In the discovery phase Eliza revealed that in December 1901, when the will went “*up in smoke*”, she had believed that if John A. died intestate the provincial government would levy a 5% tax on the estate but that the balance would be equally

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Blake was representing Frank S. Walker, Barbara Stewart, Alexander Stewart, and Jessie Stewart. Samuel Blake’s brother, Edward Blake (1833-1912), was Premier of Ontario 1871-1872 and leader of the Liberal Party of Canada 1880-1887 (but never became Prime Minister).

¹⁴² Quoted from witness testimony as reported by the *Perth Courier* May 28, 1902

¹⁴³ *Perth Courier*, May 28, 1902.

¹⁴⁴ Formerly (before re-marriage) Mrs. Barr.

¹⁴⁵ *Perth Courier*, May 28, 1902.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ *Perth Courier*, July 25, 1902.

divided among his (half) siblings. It was not until three months later, when giving a pre-trial deposition at Ottawa on March 29, 1902, that Eliza grasped the truth. Under prevailing law, in the absence of a will, 100%, not 5%, of John A.'s fortune would be forfeit to the Crown (Province of Ontario).

Fortunately for the intended beneficiaries, John A. Stewart had kept the unsigned copy of the will in his office files. However, his disaffected aunt Eliza, joined by the Province of Ontario, disputed that copy and he was forced to bring the court action to establish the document as a 'true copy' of the missing original. That hearing, before Justice Hugh McMahon at the Lanark County Court House in Perth, lasted five long days and involved no less than 10 lawyers, four of whom were KCs and seven of whom were imported from Toronto and Ottawa.

*There has perhaps been no previous event in the history of Perth which created keener or more general interest. There was a brilliant array of Counsel at the trial which will rank as the most celebrated ever heard in Perth.*¹⁴⁸

In the end, the court sided with John A. Stewart and his fellow heirs and upheld his unsigned copy of the McLaren will. Even though the Crown might have prosecuted Eliza Cameron-McIntyre for theft, destruction of evidence, obstruction of justice, witness tampering, contempt of court, perjury and more, Justice McMahon took no action against her. He confined himself to declaring her testimony simply "*inconsistent and unconvincing*" and ordering that she and the Ontario government pay their own legal costs.

Because the Ontario government appealed Justice McMahon's decision, litigation over the McLaren will went on for another three years. During that time, 1901-1903, the estate and distillery were managed by the National Trust Company as court appointed trustees. In January 1904 the will was finally probated, and the estate passed into the hands of executor John A. Stewart. John A. McLaren's brother Hugh Cameron got the Cameron homestead in Renfrew County¹⁴⁹, an adjoining property and \$2,000 cash (\$54,000). His sister Barbara Cameron-Stewart received \$5,000 (\$135,000) while his sister, Eliza Cameron-McIntyre, despite having very nearly handed the entire estate to the Crown, received \$1,500 (\$40,500) cash and \$30 (\$810) per month for the remainder of her life¹⁵⁰. The three children of his late sister Jessie Cameron-Stewart living in Cleveland were left \$1,500 (\$40,500) each. Nephew Angus McNab got \$4,000 (\$108,000), long-time distillery manager Frank S. Walker got \$5,000 (\$135,000), and Minnie Hamilton inherited \$5,000 (\$135,000). The balance of the estate, about \$93,000 (\$2,500,000), went to his nephew John A. Stewart.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ John A. had purchased the Cameron farm in 1863 and had actually conveyed title to the property to Hugh Cameron a few months before he died.

¹⁵⁰ Eliza died a decade later in 1915.

¹⁵¹ John A.'s other half-siblings, Marion, Isabella, Robert and Jennie had all died before 1901.

Prohibition -

By the time of John A. McLaren's death in 1901 there were only three scotch whiskey distilleries still operating in Ontario and two of them were in Perth. As a result of the settlement of John A.'s will, for the next decade one of those distilleries, McLaren's, was owned by John A. Stewart, while the other, Spalding & Stewart, was managed by his father, Robert Stewart.

The McLaren Distillery remained a successful and profitable venture for another dozen years under the ownership of John Stewart and the day-to-day direction of business manager John Edward de Hertel (1863-1945).



Born at Perth, de Hertel was the only child of Jean-Edouard de Hertel (b.1831) and Jane Douglas (1838-1916). He worked for the Hudson Bay Company in the Canadian Northwest as a young man, then for Canadian Foreign Trade Service in the West Indies, and later for the clothing manufacturing firm of H. Shorey & Co. of Montreal, before returning to Perth to manage the McLaren Distillery. At Perth he was also a partner in 'Campbell & de Hertel', a store offering "*Gents Furnishings & Fine Tailoring*" and in the 'Wilson & de Hertel', a ladies shoe store. Active for many years in the Canadian Militia, when war broke out in 1914 de Hertel was named Chief Recruiting Officer for Lanark and Renfrew Counties and in late 1915 was appointed at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel to raise the 130th Battalion from Perth. He served overseas for only a few weeks before being assigned as the Compulsory Service Exemption Officer at Kingston, Ontario. After the war de Hertel returned to Perth again and became

manager of the Balderson Theater. He also formed a partnership with 'O'Hara Brothers'¹⁵² to open the Perth Creamery Company and sat on the board of the 'Ottawa Wine Vaults Co.'¹⁵³ and the 'Cecil Investment Company', both of Ottawa. He was elected to Perth Town Council 1900-1902 and served a single term as Mayor in 1925-1926.

In the hands of John A. Stewart and Jean-Edouard de Hertel between 1903 and 1914 "... *business was continued as it had been in Mr. McLaren's lifetime*"¹⁵⁴, but even before McLaren's death the dark clouds of temperance and prohibition hung over the Ontario and Canadian distilling industry.

¹⁵² James Arthur O'Hara (1884-1973) and George Leonard Riley O'Hara (1887-1921), both were born at Lascelles, Les Collines-de-l'Outaouais, Quebec and both died at Perth.

¹⁵³ Located at 35-37 George Street, Ottawa, Ontario, now the Ottawa School of Art.

¹⁵⁴ John A. Stewart quoted in the *Perth Courier*, April 19, 1918.

Even as John A. was launching his distilling career, passage of the 1864 'Province of Canada Temperance Act'¹⁵⁵, known as the Dunkin Act¹⁵⁶, allowed any county or city to prohibit the sale of liquor by majority vote in a referendum (the so-called 'local option'). In 1877 a Lanark County plebiscite approved the prohibition of retail¹⁵⁷ liquor sales, although the Town of Perth disagreed and voted nay, leading the *Smiths Falls News* to observe,

Perth is going to be rich! Since the Dunkin Act came into force, five-gallon jars are in great demand, and the visits of proprietors of smaller vessels to the county town not infrequent. If the liquor business in Perth proves to be such a windfall of good fortune as did the ferry bridge¹⁵⁸, there is not the slightest doubt the people will be rolling in wealth.¹⁵⁹

The County soon found its 'dry' by-law "had not served the purpose expected of it"¹⁶⁰ (i.e. was unenforceable so long as the County Town remained 'wet') and within a year it was overturned. Application of the Dunkin Act was extended to the rest of Canada by the Scott Act¹⁶¹ of 1878 but, over the following two decades, even though prohibition had wide support and plebiscites were periodically held by individual towns and townships, most failed or, when they succeeded, were overturned within a few years. In 1898 a low turn-out (44%) nonbinding federal referendum found prohibition favored by 51% of voters nationally, but Wilfred Laurier's Liberal government did not proceed due to the narrow overall margin and overwhelming opposition in Quebec.



The temperance movement and support for outright prohibition continued to grow, however, and, in 1914, John A. Stewart announced that production at the McLaren Distillery would cease. He did so, in part, because he saw the writing on the wall when a prohibition supporting Conservative government was elected in Ontario that June. He also did so because his own political ambitions on the Federal stage risked being undermined by growing public support for prohibition, bolstered over concern that grain consumed by the distilling industry was being 'wasted' when World War One demanded all available food and other resources be dedicated to defeating Germany.

¹⁵⁵ The Province of Canada comprised today's provinces Ontario and Quebec.

¹⁵⁶ Named for its sponsor Conservative MP Christopher Dunkin (1812-1881).

¹⁵⁷ Taverns and shops were no longer licensed but hotels could sell to guests and visitors up to 10:00 p.m.

¹⁵⁸ A reference to the first Rideau Ferry bridge built in 1874.

¹⁵⁹ *Smiths Falls News*, May 10, 1878 – Quoted from *Montague, A Social history of an Irish Ontario Township 1783-1980*, by Glenn J. Lockwood (1980).

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Named for its sponsor Liberal Senator Sir Richard William Scott (1825-1913).

Robert Stewart, the father, managed the Spalding & Stewart Distillery in partnership with James Spalding Jr. until their association was dissolved in 1910 and, at the age of 70, he retired. James Spalding Jr. continued to operate the distillery until 1917 when it too was also closed by prohibition. In April 1926 *“the end in the old Spalding & Stewart distillery near the Gore Street bridge collapsed and fell into the river”*¹⁶² and two years later work began *“on the demolition of the old Spalding & Stewart distillery on Gore Street, at the bridge”*.¹⁶³ As the distillery was dismantled the still itself was salvaged and moved to the Henry K. Wampole Company pharmaceutical plant where it continued to produce alcohol, an ingredient essential to so many medicines. The Spalding & Stewart Distillery building was not entirely demolished however; some parts have survived, repurposed as residential apartments.¹⁶⁴

Two years after production ceased at the McLaren Distillery the Ontario Temperance Act of 1916 stopped all sales of alcohol within the province, although liquor could still be manufactured or imported. In 1918, a Federal government order-in-council drove the final nail when it outlawed the manufacture, importation and transportation of alcohol in Ontario or other provinces where purchase was illegal. Product already aging in the McLaren stores continued to be shipped to customers outside the province, but the copper kettle was dismantled in 1918, and the last of McLaren’s whiskey inventory was shipped to Quebec and New York in March 1919.

Last week the final shipment of malt whiskey, the product of John A. McLaren’s Distillery, took place. George Kerr¹⁶⁵, Perth Bottling Works, attended to the transfer from the warehouse to the [rail] cars. The consignment numbered 3,700 cases and the value was \$125,000. The goods went mostly to Montreal and Quebec, but the oldest was sent to New York. The shipment filled four cars and the transfer took up over two days. Now that the goods have gone, no time will be lost in tearing down or removing all the buildings
....¹⁶⁶

The decision to ship the entire inventory balance at the end of March 1919, valued at over \$1,500,000 in current dollars¹⁶⁷, was prompted by the fact that a Quebec prohibition law was due to take effect only a month later on May 1, 1919¹⁶⁸, and that New York importers would have only nine months to sell their consignment before prohibition also went into effect in the United States on January 16, 1920.

¹⁶² *Perth Courier*, April 14, 1926.

¹⁶³ *Perth Courier*, October 4, 1928.

¹⁶⁴ The apartment building at 33 Harvey Street is the surviving portion of the Spalding & Stewart Distillery built in 1832 by William Locke. The rear wall stands on the south bank of the Tay River, and may be seen from the west end of the Gore Street bridge or from the rear garden of the Sunflower Bakery (100 Gore Street East). The east end of the distillery, that once fronted Gore Street, collapsed in 1926 and was replaced by a building (106 Gore Street East) that has, over the years, served as a gas station, paint store, cellular telephone store and currently (2019) houses a carpet store.

¹⁶⁵ George Terrance Kerr (1876-1937) was born at Winnipeg, the son of John Andrew Kerr and Mary Margaret Wallace, he married Sarah Nagle (1881-1957) in 1913 at Perth. His father was Perth Town Clerk 1894-1934. George Kerr served three years in the U.S. Navy and fought in the Boer War with Lord Strathcona’s Horse. He later worked at the Wampole pharmaceutical plant and then founded the Perth Bottling Works in early 1920s and, through 1935, produced soda water, cream soda, ginger beer, ginger ale, orange crush and siphon soda.

¹⁶⁶ *Perth Courier*, March 28, 1919.

¹⁶⁷ 2019.

¹⁶⁸ Prohibiting ‘spirits’ only; a last-minute referendum had excluded beer and wine from the law.

Beginning in 1918 the McLaren Distillery buildings were torn down in stages¹⁶⁹ and in December 1919 John A. Stewart approached Town Council with an offer to donate the land on which it had stood, as well as adjoining portions of Haggart's Island he owned, to the municipality. He stipulated, however, that the 10 acres of land could only be used as a park and that it should be named in memory of his late uncle, John A. McLaren. That offer was never taken up, however, and for a quarter century following Stewart's death the property served as unofficial greenspace, maintained by John A. Stewart's widow Jessie Henderson-Stewart, until 1947 when she deeded the property to the town, together with a \$20,000 endowment fund to provide for its maintenance. Jessie made the donation as a memorial to her late husband, and thus it became Stewart Park rather than McLaren Park as originally intended.



Stewart Park

In 1948 Jessie Stewart¹⁷⁰ also donated the 11-acre property on which Stewart Elementary School and the Perth & District Indoor Pool now stand to the Perth Board of Education. That large tract of land at the corner of Wilson Street and Sunset Boulevard had also once belonged to John A. McLaren, the home he occupied for the last decade of his life having stood in the southeast corner of what is now the school playground.

John A. Stewart -

John A. McLaren's inheritor, John Alexander 'Jack' Stewart, was born in Renfrew County the year before his father, Robert Stewart, moved his family to Perth and went to work at his brother-in-law's distillery. John Stewart grew up in Perth and attended Perth Public School and the Perth Collegiate Institute where principal Thomas McKee Henry (1854-1935) considered him the "*most brilliant pupil*"¹⁷¹ to have ever passed through his hands.

¹⁶⁹ The retail shop had been torn down in 1911.

¹⁷⁰ Jessie Henderson-Stewart was a two-time National President of the International Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE), served on the Canadian Council of Children and Family Welfare, was a board member of Shernfold School in Ottawa (a school for "*manually-minded girls*"), a Director of the Great War Memorial Hospital at Perth, District Commissioner of the Girl Guides, Honorary President of the Women's Hospital Aid Association, Honorary President of the Perth Museum, and was honored in 1935 with the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for 'Public Service in the Dominion of Canada'.

¹⁷¹ *St. Crispin's Legacy: Shoemaking in Perth, Ontario 1834-2001*, by John A. McKenty (2014).

As a child Stewart ran errands for his uncle at the distillery and then apprenticed as a 12-year-old merchant's clerk in Perth, before moving to Toronto at age 17 to work in a dry goods store. Finding life behind a shop counter less than stimulating he enrolled to study law at Osgoode Hall. Graduating in 1891 he returned to Perth and articulated with the law practice of Edward Elliott & Joseph McKenzie Rogers (1859-1908), joining that firm as a partner when he was called to the bar in 1895. When Elliott was made a Middlesex County Judge, the Perth firm became Rogers & Stewart. He was later senior partner of the law firm of Stewart, Hope¹⁷² & O'Donnell¹⁷³. He was made Kings Council (KC) in 1921.



John Alexander Stewart (1867-1922)

Stewart was elected to Town Council for the 1897-1898 terms and, from 1900, served a four-year term as Mayor. He also sat on the Perth Board of Education for several years. When, on the death of the incumbent, Dr. Adelbert Edward Hanna (1863-1918), the Federal seat for South Lanark fell vacant, Stewart was elected MP by acclamation in May 1918. In 1921 he joined the cabinet of Prime Minister Arthur Meighen with the portfolio of Minister for Railways & Canals.



Jessie Mable Henderson-Stewart (1868-1956)

John A. Stewart's law practice and investments had made him a prosperous man even before his uncle died leaving him, at the age of 34, an inheritance valued at the modern equivalent of over \$2,500,000. In 1907, at the age of 40, he married 39-year-old Jessie Mable Henderson (1868-1956), daughter of Jesse Thomas Henderson (1835-1895) and Elizabeth Wordie (1840-1919). His wife's father had been a prominent Perth merchant, amassing considerable wealth as local agent of the Cockshutt Plough Company¹⁷⁴ and the Union Fire & Life Assurance Company. Her mother was the daughter of William Wordie (1808-1853) and Jane Rendick/Rendnick/Rudnick (1807-1865). Wordie was an early hotel-keeper at Perth and brew-master at the William Lock Brewery for more than 25 years from c1827 to 1853. Stewart moved into his wife's childhood home, Thuresson Place, one of Perth's grander residences, at 23 Drummond Street, West.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Lieutenant Colonel, John Andrew Hope KC (1890-1954).

¹⁷³ Hugh Anthony O'Donnell KC (1922-1974).

¹⁷⁴ The Cockshutt dealership was located at #2 Wilson Street West where the Perkins Building now stands.

¹⁷⁵ Now the Perth Manor Boutique Hotel.

*“It was from the enterprising ‘booze king’ that the Stewart fortune and holdings were acquired”*¹⁷⁶ and in the hands of lawyer John A. Stewart, *“a shrewd businessman and opportunist, as well as a master of litigation”*¹⁷⁷ the McLaren distilling fortune impacted the town of Perth on a scale that distiller John A. could never have imagined. Skillfully using his uncle’s ‘whiskey money’ as leverage, in little more than a decade Stewart created the core of Perth’s 20th century industrial base.



Thuresson Place, 23 Drummond Street West, Perth, home of James & Jessie Stewart

In 1905 Stewart was instrumental in bringing the Henry K. Wampole Co. Ltd. to Perth and was soon its president. In 1912 he brought the Andrew Jergens Co. Ltd. to Perth and in the same year financially rescued the fledgling Perth Shoe Co. Ltd., becoming president of both ventures. In 1918 he created and became president of the Perth Improvement Co. Ltd. that built 20 houses for employees of the Wampole and Jergens factories¹⁷⁸. Stewart was also at the forefront of an aggressive campaign that attracted the Caldwell Taybank Woolen Mills (later Tayside Textiles) to Perth. In 1914 Stewart purchased and became publisher of the *Perth Expositor* newspaper, and during the early 1900’s he also served as a Director of the Frost & Wood Co. Ltd. (foundry) at Smiths Falls. From 1918 until his death Stewart was also Chairman of the Perth Board of Trade.

¹⁷⁶ *Perth Courier*, May 14, 1964.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ The company-built duplexes on properties purchased along Drummond, Beckwith, Herriott and DeWatteville (now Colbourne) Streets, later known as ‘Wampole Houses’.



Henry K. Wampole Company



Andrew Jergens Company



Perth Shoe Company



Tayside Textiles

The impact of all that whiskey money might have been even greater, but in June 1922 Hon. John Alexander Stewart, K.C., L.L.D., M.P., aged just 55 years, fell ill with “a *lingering anemia*”¹⁷⁹. He was admitted to the Royal Victoria Hospital at Montreal and died there four months later on October 7th. He was buried in Elmwood Cemetery, Perth, but not in the McLaren-Stewart mausoleum he had built for his uncle, parents, aunts and other relatives. His grave and that of his wife, Jessie Henderson-Stewart, who died in 1956, lie in their own plot in Elmwood Section-A/2.

Laudatory obituaries flowed from the pens of newspaper editors across eastern Ontario.

He was one of the most approachable of men, of a kindly, obliging nature, who made friends everywhere. He could have opted out of life as one of the ‘idle rich’, but desired to serve his fellow man, and having served them as fully as he could as a private citizen, sought to enlarge his activities in that direction by entering public life¹⁸⁰ ... He was an improver, a creator, and inspirer, and a wizard in business enterprise¹⁸¹ ... He did not believe in luck but considered in his credo that ‘the lack of courage to make a venture

¹⁷⁹ *Perth Courier*, October 13, 1922.

¹⁸⁰ *Smiths Falls Record-News*, as quoted in *John Alexander Stewart, Perth’s White Knight of Industry*, by Donald F. Sherwin (2006).

¹⁸¹ *Carleton Place Canadian*, as quoted in *John Alexander Stewart, Perth’s White Knight of Industry*, by Donald F. Sherwin (2006).

accounts for the comparatively small number of men and women who make a signal success of life¹⁸² ... If he had lived, he would undoubtedly have been a powerful factor in shaping Canada's destiny¹⁸³ ... He was not only the leading citizen of Lanark County, but was probably the most outstanding individual the town of Perth has ever had¹⁸⁴.

*"His niche in the business life of Perth will be difficult to fill," the Perth Courier lamented; "an aching void is left behind"*¹⁸⁵. Yet, while listing Stewart's many accomplishments in considerable detail, the *Courier* obituary of three page-length columns made no mention at all of his connection to John A. McLaren or the role McLaren's distilling fortune played in those achievements. Stewart had been playing down his whiskey connections from the time he first entered the political arena shortly after John A.'s death, at a time when the temperance movement was gaining traction, and especially so after prohibition won the hearts and minds of voters in 1914-1916. To satisfy what proved to be a passing political fancy, John A. McLaren and his copper still were written out of the story of John A. Stewart and consigned to the shadows of Perth's history.

By the time sanity returned and prohibition ended in 1927, John A. McLaren had been in his grave for a quarter of a century and his nephew John A. Stewart dead for five years. Over the decades and generations that followed, however, thousands of Perth citizens cashed pay cheques from Wampole, Jergens, Brown Shoe and Tayside Textiles, or from the thousands of spin-off jobs those factory payrolls created. Perth would do well to occasionally recall its debt to John A.'s whiskey still on the Tay and raise a glass of fine single malt to the memory of the *"unfortunate child"*.

- Ron W. Shaw (2019)

¹⁸² *Perth Expositor*, as quoted in *John Alexander Stewart, Perth's White Knight of Industry*, by Donald F. Sherwin (2006). At the time of his death Stewart owned the *Perth Expositor*.

¹⁸³ *Kingston Standard*, as quoted in *John Alexander Stewart, Perth's White Knight of Industry*, by Donald F. Sherwin (2006).

¹⁸⁴ *Almonte Gazette*, as quoted in *John Alexander Stewart, Perth's White Knight of Industry*, by Donald F. Sherwin (2006).

¹⁸⁵ *Perth Courier*, October 13, 1922.