



10 April 2016

Josh Morgan
Councillor, Ward 7
City of London, Ontario
joshmorgan@london.ca

Dear Josh:

I am writing in response to your letter referencing the request for demolition of the property at 1656 Hyde Park Road and asking for additional thoughts on the matter.

That property was owned by my father and mother, Whitney and Evelyn Colbert, and was our family home from 1953-1984. My sister, Nancy, and I are saddened by the current state of the house and by the prospect of its demolition, even as we recognize that time brings changes.

I am a writer and researcher by profession and have a particular interest in local history. In 2006, when the house was a flower shop, I wrote an essay that I called "The House at the End of the Sidewalk" in which I outlined the history of the house, based on both research and recollections, and tried to give readers a sense of what life was like in the years we lived there.

More recently, I have begun a series of small books about Hyde Park. The first, *When Christmas Came to the Village*, was published in 2011. The cover (see attachment) includes a small reproduction of a drawing of the house done by London artist Silvia Clarke in the 1980s. Inside, it includes a brief description of the house. That description and the cover drawing are available on my website, www.villagechristmas.ca. The book is available at www.volumesdirect.com also through Chapters and Amazon. My second book, *When School Came to the Village*, is available from the same sources.

I am attaching a copy of this article (which may have been published locally, although I do not have details). It may give you and others important historical details about the house.

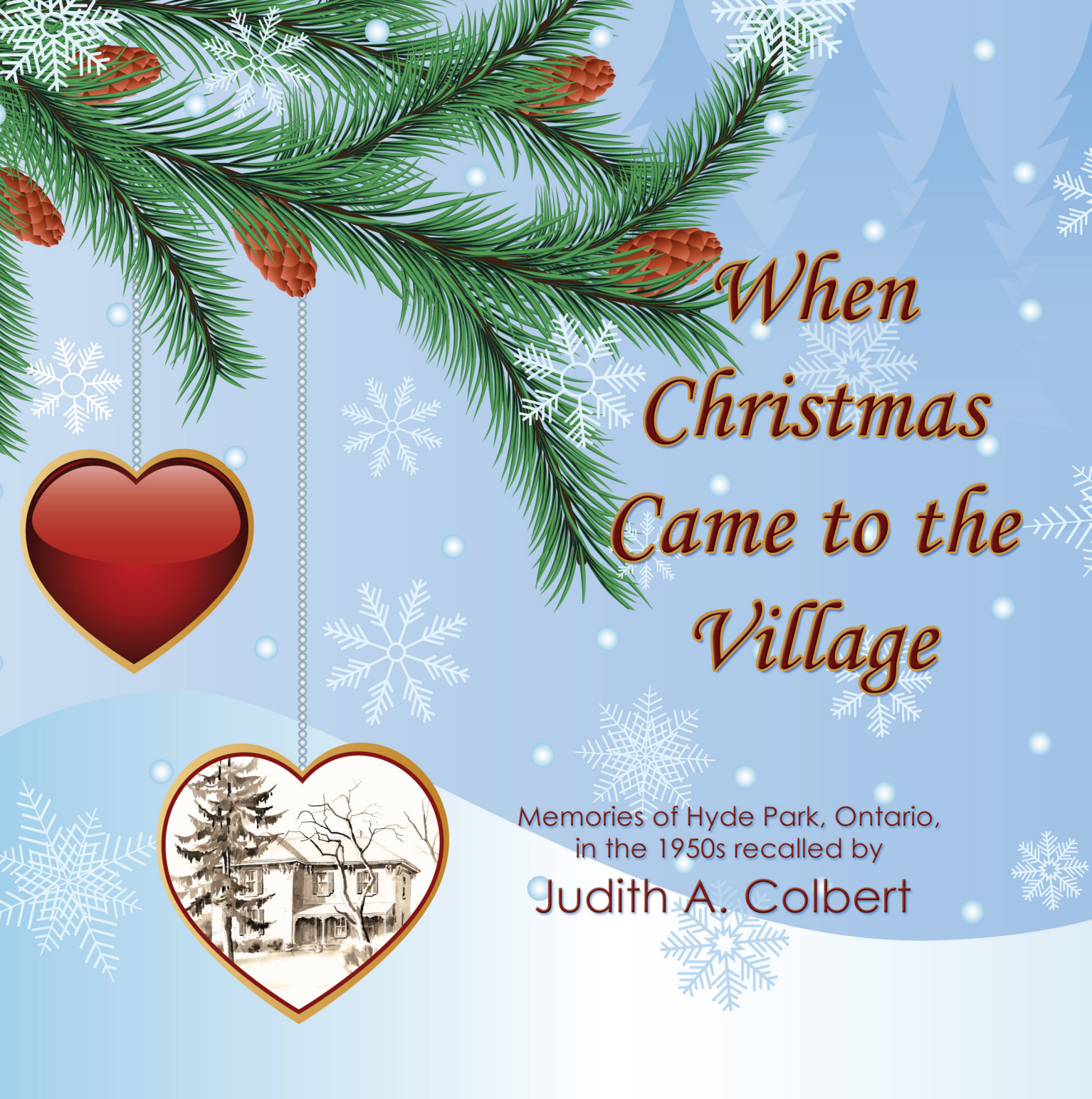
Our roots in the area are deep. Our family came to London Township in 1818 and 1830. Prior to moving to the house in Hyde Park village, we lived on a farm on Gainsborough road purchased by my grandfather, Ernest Colbert, in 1922. It was finally owned by the Healy family whose name is reflected in a street name there. Our farm was across the road and slightly south of where Dalmagarry cottage was once located, on land where settlement in the township began in 1818.

Overall, I appreciate your interest in this situation and the attention you have drawn to the demolition of heritage properties. I am sure that it is very difficult for residents of the area today to imagine what life was like in Hyde Park through to the late twentieth century. Since then, we who lived there have watched as our past has been all but erased. Very soon, I fear, it will live only in the stones in St George's Cemetery. I hope that its replacement will eventually share some of the community spirit that was a hallmark of our village.

Sincerely,

Judith A. Colbert, PhD
Consultant – Writer, Researcher, Training Specialist

cc. London Advisory Committee on Heritage



*When
Christmas
Came to the
Village*



Memories of Hyde Park, Ontario,
in the 1950s recalled by
Judith A. Colbert

The House at the End of the Sidewalk

by

Judith (Judy) Colbert

December 2006

Travelling north from Hyde Park village corner, Flowers by Martha occupies the house at the end of the sidewalk – its likely position since around 1914 when Hyde Park’s fledgling Women’s Institute helped raise funds for the construction of sidewalks in the village. The house itself was built long before sidewalks, sometime around 1890, by Elizabeth (Besty) McLachlan (nee Robson), a widow who lived out her life there with her daughters and sister, Ann. Betsy’s daughters, Mary Ann and Catherine (Kate), continued to live in what was popularly called “the McLachlan house” until the late 1940s when it was purchased by the Welburns who sold it around 1952, to my father and mother – Whitney and Evelyn Colbert. It remained in our family for over thirty years and was “home” for me and my sister, Nancy.

Always the house at the end of the sidewalk, unofficially the beginning of the village if you approach from the north, the stately Victorian house had a presence of its own. Defined by a white picket fence and tall windows with shutters that were variously red, blue and green, the house was sheltered by trees – a huge maple in the north-east corner of the front yard, two smaller maples on the south east edge of the lawn, a tall spruce by the front door and, most beloved, a sprawling snow apple at the edge of the front verandah. In fact, in spring, the house was surrounded by blossoms. In addition to the apple tree in the front, a sweet cherry tree from Charlie Phillips’ house next door hung over the driveway on the south east, and sour cherry trees extended the whole width of the back yard. Later, my mother planted an apple tree just outside our back window – the only one of our fruit trees that remains and continues to give a bountiful harvest of yellow transparencies every other year.

We enjoyed other harvests, as well. We always had a large garden at the back, with a clump of rhubarb along the side. When we arrived, raspberries thrived under the cherry trees, and later my mother always maintained a healthy strawberry patch. Almost a quarter of the back yard was given over to black current bushes. It was while picking black currents one day that our family friend, Annie Routledge Player, remarked that she had watched our house being built when she was a girl walking from her home at the corner of Hyde Park Road and Six Mile Road to the school at Hyde Park Corner. Annie was born in 1881 and her recollections seem to set the construction date just about right.

In style, the house is typical of its time, as a two-storey L-shaped structure built of what was always described as local white brick. Its exterior charm stems from the ornate brackets that seem to support the eaves, and from the gingerbread decorations across the verandah (the railing was added long after we left). Inside, the ceilings were high. The floors were pine everywhere except the kitchen where they were a sturdier maple. We installed a heating system with radiators and took out the stove pipes, although evidence of their presence remains today. We removed a curious window between one of the upper bedrooms and the stairwell, likely designed to bring light to that dark passage, but left

another oddity, stairs that divided near the bottom to either go straight down to the front door or curve into the kitchen – much to the delight of children who thought it was great fun to run ‘round and ‘round through the house. We also added crown moulding and eliminated the archway between what would have been a front and back parlor, to make one large living room (now a showcase for flowers), but otherwise left the structure as we found it.

In our years there, the Colbert house provided a large and generous setting for family life and entertaining, and it seems fitting that it has since become first a tea house and now a flower shop. In the dining area of the L-shaped kitchen, just as you entered what we called “the side door,” my mother loved to pull out the table and easily provided birthday and holiday meals for 12 or more people, and accommodated many more for parties and get-togethers in the living room beyond. At Christmas, we always had a large, decorated tree at the end of that long room, positioned so that its lights could be seen from the road. My father, in particular, liked to make a pine swag with a bow for the front door and string lights across the verandah for additional cheer. In every season, we brought flowers from our garden and filled the house with blooms.

Times have changed, of course. When we arrived, the house was surrounded by vacant land. Between us and the Foote’s to the north, the strip that is now North Routledge Street was a field that, away from the road, eventually became swampy and a great place to skate in winter. The only neighbours across from us were the cows that grazed in Harvey Herbert’s field. Eventually, however, the new street and businesses appeared. Our ample garden in the back was seeded over, and the fruit trees in the back failed, perhaps done in by walnut trees that now stand so tall. The trees in the front disappeared, gradually felled by disease or old age. Happily, however, the house remains and has evolved with the times. Now, well into its second century, may it continue to shelter its memories and support the aspirations of those who look to the future.

- Note: Information about the Hyde Park Women’s Institute and the McLachlan family is from the *London Township History Book*.

Other points of interest ...

- Betsy’s only other adult child was a son, John Alexander, who became transportation manager for Barnum & Bailey and later Ringling Brothers Circus and lived in Bridgeport, Conn.

London Township History Book

- The McLachlan sisters participated in community life, including the Women’s Institute. Pearl Leslie, a cousin, remembers as a child, visiting Mary Ann and Kate with her mother, the former Lela Colbert. Before her marriage, Lela had lived around the corner with her father and mother, John and Jerusha Colbert, in the house that was home to the Liscumb family while my sister and I were growing up in Hyde Park.