



ROBERT HOLT (1801-1876)

Mayor of Dundas, 1853-1854



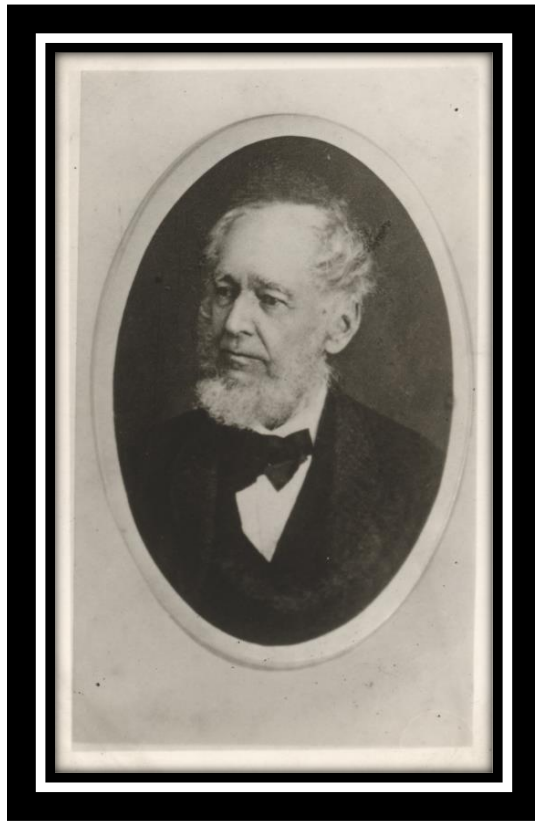
MAYORS OF DUNDAS

A volunteer project of the Dundas Museum and Archives

ROBERT HOLT 1801-1876

BREWER MILLER MANUFACTURER

MAYOR OF DUNDAS 1853-1854



Robert Holt was born to Robert and Rebecca Holt in Chichester, Sussex and was christened on July 29, 1801 at All Saints in the same parish. In 1833 he emigrated to Canada from Chichester, to seek his fortune in Dundas.

In 1834 Holt purchased the Wentworth Grist Mill which had been newly built by William Dewstow on the south side of Spencer Creek near the Old Ancaster Road. That same

year Henry Gray arrived from England and entered into a partnership with Holt. By 1836 the successful partners built the Wentworth Brewery near the grist mill.

In about 1840 Holt married Ann Agnes Lesslie (born 1806 in Dundee, Scotland) of Dundas. Ann Lesslie may have been Robert's second wife, his first, Sarah having died at age 30 in 1837 (interred Old Union Cemetery, Dundas). (From *Ancestry.ca*)

Their daughter, Grace E. was born in about 1842 and Helen Rebecca (Ellen) followed more than a decade later in about 1853. (Ellen married James Fenton Lesslie of Kingston on June 30, 1874).

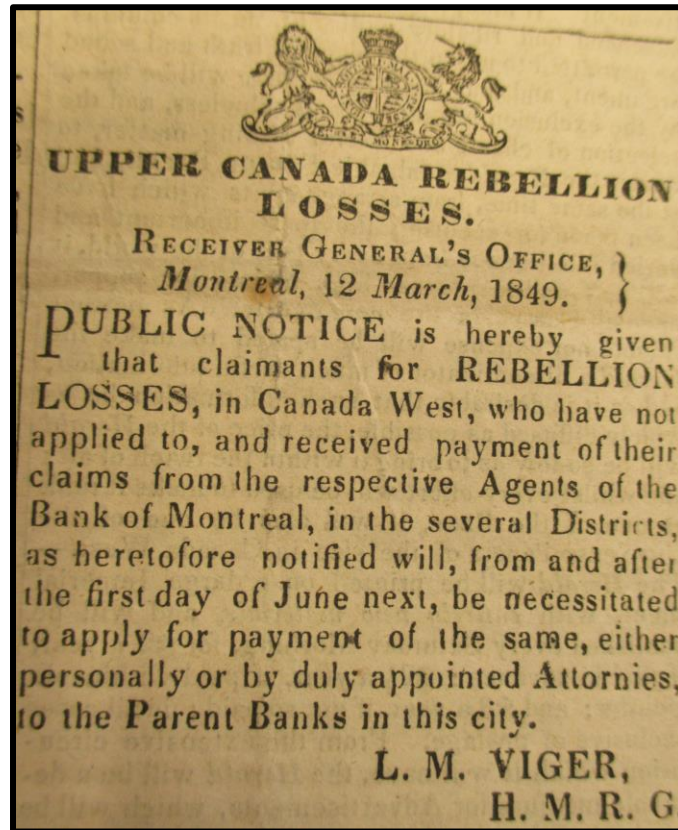
The Holt family home was a 2 storey, brick house at 12 Old Ancaster Road "overlooking his enterprises", according to Woodhouse. The author of the *History of the Town of Dundas* says that local rumour had it that there was a vault approached by a tunnel connecting Holt's house on the hill to his storage cellar for ale.

Woodhouse says that he himself did indeed find a barred entrance just above the reservoir midway between the house and the brewery (site in 1965 of Bibby's Basket Factory) but a man would not have fit inside the opening. *Woodhouse, Vol 3 page 48.*



Holt & Gray Brewery, Dundas. (P-3274)

In 1842 there were rumours regarding the solvency of the Gore Bank. This was the first chartered bank (1835) in Hamilton, founded by local businessmen. At a town meeting at Bamberger's Inn, chaired by Robert Holt, local investors were reassured when James Ewart offered to back the bank with his own money. *Woodhouse, Vol. 3, p. 47*



By March of 1846 Holt and Gray had purchased another business, the **Wentworth Iron Foundry** which manufactured waterwheels, engines, boilers, threshing machines, ploughs, stoves, and other metal goods vital to daily life in the growing community. In 1851 they admitted Thomas Davis and John M. Thornton into the partnership.

In this same year, 1846, Robert Holt accepted the position of Magistrate.

Several influential businessmen banded together in 1848 to create the **Dundas Building Society** and nominated Holt as the President. Their purpose was to raise funds by subscription which would be loaned to other entrepreneurs. The enterprise much resembled a credit union. The Society wound up a few years later with no losses and very little in the way of dividends. *Woodhouse, Vol 3. Appendix # 17 pgs. 59 & 72*

By the 1850s Robert Holt was considered to be one of the leading businessmen in Dundas, primarily a brewer and miller, and later as a manufacturer.

In 1852 Holt and Gray purchased the *Leavitt Axe Factory*, re-named it the *Globe Foundry*, and expanded the enterprise to produce brass items as well as axes. Less than a decade later in May of 1859 their foundry was lost to fire.

The Weekly Warder, Dundas, Canada West

April 7, 1854

Extreme Test. _ If you wish to ascertain the temper of a young lady, look at her nails and the tips of her gloves. If they are ragged and much bitten you may be sure she is peevish, irritable, quarrelsome and too much ready to show her teeth at the smallest provocation.

When the first Town Council of Dundas was elected in 1848, Robert Holt represented Ward 2. About this time the Councillors had decided that the growing importance of Dundas warranted an official town seal.

Councillor Holt proposed a seal which he, himself had sketched. It depicted an eagle resting after surmounting many difficulties as well as other emblems. His artistic attempts at the eagle were ridiculed by the other Councillors. One said that the eagle looked as if it had been shot down and another declared that “the bird looked as if it had eaten too much and had stopped to pick its teeth or burp.” *Woodhouse, Vols. 2 & 3.*

Despite his artistic shortcomings, the Town Council elected Holt to serve as the fourth Mayor of Dundas in 1853 and 1854.

Under Mayor Holt there were many pressing local issues to be addressed:

By-laws were passed to regulate the slaughterhouses, probably, due to the odour and pests they produced.

Further by-laws were enacted to restrain bulls, horses and goats from running at large, a sure hazard to the locals.

In 1854 the Town Council decided to lease for the sum of 25 pounds/year to Alfred Bennett, saloon keeper, “*all that part of the Basement story (sic) of the Town Hall of the said Town of Dundas AS IS NOT PRESENTLY USED AND OCCUPIED AS A LOCK-UP CELL FOR THE SAFEKEEPING OF PRISONERS to be used as...a saloon.*”

The Crystal Palace Saloon carried on its trade for five years in this prime location.
Picturesque Dundas Revisited, pg. 50

The Weekly Warder, Dundas, Canada West

March 31, 1854

Just Received _ Two Bales of Prime Buffalo Robes

James Dixon, Dundas

Dundas Warder and Weekly Agriculturist

December 10, 1852

Corporation of Dundas

By-Law No. -

To grant a sum of Money for the purpose of

***Improving the road on North Street from the Willow
Tree on King Street to East Street and on King Street
West and for the Construction of sidewalks in the Town
And.....whereas the assessment return of the said Town
For the year 1851...was the amount of 14,700 pounds; Be
It therefore enacted ...in the year 1853 and in each and every
Year thereafter...until 1862 a special rate (tax) of one penny, half-
penny in the pound over and above all other rates.***

SANDS' SARSAPARILLA.

W. HOWLAND & CO.
NEW-YORK.

IN QUART BOTTLES.

FOR PURIFYING THE BLOOD

and for the cure of Scrofula, Rheumatism, Stub-
born Ulcers, Dyspepsia, Salt Rheum, Fever
Sores, Erysipelas, Pimples, Biles, Mer-
curial Diseases, Cutaneous Erup-
tions, Liver Complaint, Bronch-
itis, Consumption, Female
Complaints, Loss of
Appetite, Gene-
ral Debility,
&c. &c.

Weekly Warder, June 4, 1850

Construction of the *Great Western Railroad* from Hamilton to Niagara was completed in the autumn of 1853. The first train running on November 1, 1853 consisted of six cars filled with many guests planning to attend a celebratory dinner at Clifton House (Niagara). A few miles away from their destination the locomotive broke down and they completed the journey in carriages. But the dinner was “achieved” according to the reporter witnessing the grand event.

On December 23, 1853, the *Dundas Warder* reported a dispute between John Paterson and Robert Holt regarding the handling of a murder trial of one Burnside. With Burnside languishing in gaol his trial had been postponed due to the lack of witnesses.

Mayor Holt objected to the “arbitrary and tyrannical” proceedings conducted by Mr. Paterson in his role as Magistrate sitting at the trial of Burnside. In his written statement the Mayor signed his name, Robert Holt, Mayor of Dundas.

This ignited a furor in the town Council which had not been consulted on the matter. Mayor Holt was censured, not for defending Mr. Burnside nor for his interference in the case, but for the use of the designation **Mayor** without permission.

*The Weekly Warder, Dundas, Canada West
March 31, 1854*

*A Heartless Scoundrel _ The London Prototype says
Mr. Graves who has charge of the pensioners west of London for the
protection of the peaceable disposed labourers of the Great Western
Railroad detected a scoundrel in the act of throwing a stone as large as he
could lift from a high bank on to the passenger cars as the train was
passing through a deep cut, evidently intending to destroy life; he is now
in the cells, thanks to Henry Graves. He stands a good chance of taking a
trip to Kingston.*

In April 1854, the local *Dundas Warder* reported a “Productive” Town Council Meeting.

Petitions were presented for:

The construction of side-walks on Baldwin and Flamboro streets; on the Governor’s Road from Main Street to the western limits; and on the north side of King Street from Mr. G. Bickle’s to the Gore Mills;

To remedy the inconvenience caused by the removal of the Registry Office from the Town (submitted by Dr. Hamilton);

Council Meeting continued:

The grading and Macadamizing of Hatt street from John Street to the Market House and Foundry Street (submitted by John Gartshore);

Rendering of the cells under the Market House of service to the Town, as in their present state they are unfit for the reception of any human being. (submitted by A. F. Begue);

A report was presented by Councillor Quarry on behalf of the Cemetery Committee recommending a grant of 15 pounds for plants and shrubs and painting of the fence;

A report of the Fire and Water Committee recommended that the room in the Upper Engine House not be let for a day-school;

And finally, the Mayor was authorized to procure a safe for the use of the Town.

to
SS

ST. GEORGE & DRAGON INN,
DUNDAS.

—

THE Subscriber begs to inform his friends and the travelling public that he has returned to his Old Stand, at the corner of the Governor's Road and Main Street, and resumed the business formerly carried on by him. His accommodations are good, and he hopes, by strict attention to the comforts of his guests, to merit a share of public patronage.

☞ *Good Stabling.* ☞

R. BICKELL.

312

Dundas, May, 1852. 31

The Weekly Warder, Dundas, Canada West October 18, 1854

Porter and Ale

Just received and for sale, a few casks of LONDON PORTER in
wood and bottles

Also, Tennant's and Netherlord's SCOTCH ALE

Thos. H. McKenzie
Wellington Buildings, Dundas

The Weekly Warder, Dundas, Canada West

March 31, 1854

Registrar's Fees

We see that a petition has been presented to Parliament by our old "friend" James Durand...praying that the scale of fees formerly allowed to registrars be restored... Perhaps Jamie anticipates a General Election soon...Our registrars are too well paid now and if too lazy to work for a fair remuneration let them resign.

In October 1853, the Crimean War broke out between Russia and Britain, France, and the Ottoman Turks. Britain entered the Black Sea in January 1854 to protect Turkish transports. Although far off in the east the war directly affected Dundas' industries which exported manufactured goods. Reports of the battles and atrocities appeared in every issue of local papers.

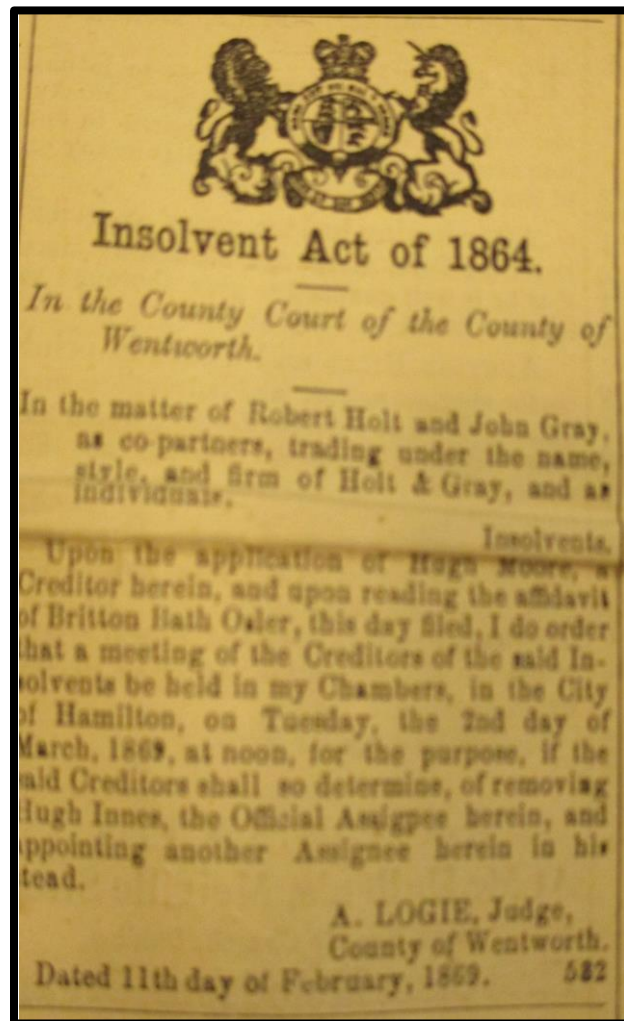
Crimean War

The Departure of the British Baltic Fleet from Portsmouth

Queen Victoria, on board of her little yacht Fairy preceded the fleet out to sea having previously received the visits of the Admirals and Captains in command, who in obedience to a signal to that effect repaired on board the Fairy to take leave of Her Majesty and Prince Albert. Hundreds of thousands of spectators, both afloat and ashore, witnessed the spectacle with the greatest enthusiasm was displayed. Admiral Napier, the gallant old sailor, addressed the crowd, "I will do the best I can to prevent the British Flag from being tarnished...The fleet is a new one; the system of warfare is new; great consideration is required to ascertain how it is best to manage a fleet urged by steam..."

The papers of the day reported that the English fleet was returning to various ports for the winter and would prepare to sail for further fighting in the Crimea in the spring.

The conclusion of the Crimean War in February 1858 had a serious impact on the fortunes of merchants far away in the Canadas. Holt and his then partner, John Gray, son of his former partner, suffered disastrous losses and eventually were forced to declare bankruptcy.



Weekly Warder, February 18, 1869

Another pressing issue of Mayor Holt's time in office was that of land set aside for use by the Church of England's clergy, although Dundas was not directly affected.

***The Weekly Warder, Dundas, Canada West
Friday Morning, November 7, 1854***

Clergy reserves Debate Hotly Debated for 25 Years

The Bill for the Secularisation of the Clergy Reserves was carried in committee at one o'clock Saturday morning last. The Clergy Reserve question has been the great stumbling block for a quarter century and with its settlement we may now expect the energies of the Government to be directed more particularly...(to) the advancement of the trade of commerce of the Province.

After he had completed his two terms of office, Robert Holt continued with business until he had to concede insolvency in early 1869.

In the 1871 Census enumerator, George Riddler lists Robert Holt, aged 69 as living in Dundas. His sister-in-law, Grace Lesslie Paterson (widow of former President of the Town Council, John Paterson) is also living with Holt, his wife and his daughter, Grace.

Dundas Star & Wentworth News Record

August 2, 1917

Miss Grace E. Holt

Of Kingston who was buried in Grove Cemetery last week was the eldest daughter of the late Robert Holt. In the 1850s he was one of the leading manufacturers of Dundas. He and John Gray ran the Dundas Brewery at the foot of the Ancaster Hill in the stone building now occupied by Bibby's basket factory. Later with Thomas Davis as his partner he purchased the Wentworth Flour Mills and with partners he opened the Foundry and Mill which produced engines, boilers, mill machinery and stoves. In 1858 the business failed. His estate was wound up by James Coleman. Mr. Holt built the residence which is now owned by Col Gwyn.

GUELPH AND DUNDAS ROAD.

TO BE SOLD BY PUBLIC AUCTION,

ON FRIDAY, 4th JUNE, 1852, at P.
FREEL'S INN, BROCK ROAD, the

Tolls of the Guelph & Dundas Road.

The Sale will take place at two o'clock, p.m.

A deposit of £5 will be required to be paid down, on the name of the purchaser of each Gate being declared.

The purchaser of each Gate to enter into bonds with two sufficient sureties for the punctual payment of the rent monthly.

Each intending purchaser to be prepared with the names of his sureties before the commencement of sale.

Purchasers to enter into possession on the 21st June, 1852.

The Board of Commissioners will meet at 11 o'clock, a. m., when the upset price of each Gate and further particulars will be made known.

By order,

A. D. FERRIER,

Sec. G. & D. R. Co.

Guelph, April 23, 1852.

307-td

pub-

"THE OLD LINE"

Between Dundas and Hamilton.

THE Subscriber begs to inform his old friends and the travelling public, that he has commenced running

THREE TIMES A-DAY,

between Dundas and Hamilton, for the conveyance of Passengers to and from the Lake Steamers, &c. He will leave his Office, on King Street, and Riley's Hotel, at half-past 5, and 10 o'clock, a. m., and 3 o'clock, p. m.

Returning, he will leave the City Hotel, and Austin's (late Mitchell's) Hotel, Hamilton, at 8 o'clock, a. m., and 1 o'clock, p. m., and on the arrival of the Toronto and Lewiston Boats, about half-past 6 o'clock, p. m.

Passengers leaving their names at either of the above places, or at the Stage Office, in Dundas, will be called for at any place in either Dundas or Hamilton.

FARE EACH WAY, 1s. 3d.

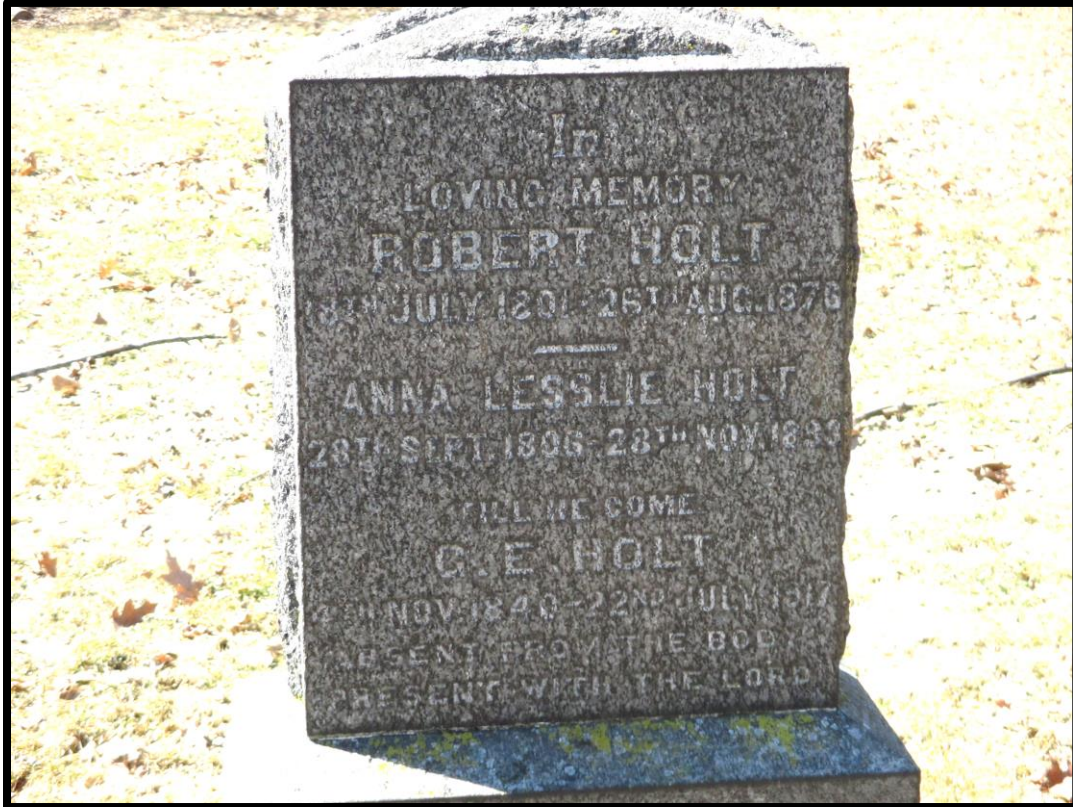
JAMES LEE.

Remember the OLD LINE!

Dundas, April 2, 1851.

252

In 1876 Robert Holt passed away at the age of 74. His final resting place was in the Grove Cemetery in the Holt plot #208 Parkview section.



Grove Cemetery, 2014

ROBERT HOLT, MAYOR, 1853-1854

DUNDAS TIMELINE

1853 Great Western Railway arrives in Dundas

1850s Dundas enacts bylaws to regulate domestic animals roaming the streets

1854 The Crystal Palace Saloon opens in the basement of the Town Hall

1858 Dundas manufacturing adversely affected by the end of the Crimean War

WORLD TIMELINE

1853 US squadron under Admiral Perry arrives at Japan & demands that Japan open up for world trade

1853 Brown jeans made in Austria by Levi Straus are sold to US miners

1854 A team of nurses led by Florence Nightingale set to work in the Crimea despite obstinate refusal of their assistance by the doctors

1854 Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava is a blunder in which 198 of the 607 who rode out survive

SOURCES

The Dundas Warder and Halton County General Advertiser 1847-1849

The Dundas True Banner and Halton County Advertiser 1860

The Dundas Star & Wentworth News Recorder 1917

The Dundas Historical Museum & Archives

The Province of Ontario A History Vol. 1 Jesse Edgar Middleton
Dominion Publishing Co. Ltd

History of The Town of Dundas, Woodhouse, Roy Volume 3

Millennium Year By Year A Chronicle of World History

Industries of Canada: Historical and Commercial Sketches: Hamilton and Environs

Bixby, M. G.

Ancestry.com