

# *the* Clock Tower

## What's written on the walls

*The signatures inside Galt's old Town Hall clock tower*

You walk up the narrow wooden staircase of Old City Hall, and the smell, the old smell, the smell of the ages, is drawn into your lungs with every breath. The attic at Central Presbyterian Church is like this.

Quietly the years have come and gone in this remote niche, hidden from most of us, yet so close to all.

There is the bell. And the four faces of the clock, through which the diffuse light of a June afternoon fills the cubicle. Few people have been here. Those who have, almost to a one, have left their name and the date of their visit on the four plastered walls.

Some have worked on the clock. Some, like me, just wanted to walk up the tower, to see what was up there. As a child I marvelled at going up the ladder past the bells inside the steeple towering above Central church.

A silent history lives in this tower. The passage of so many seasons, so many winters and summers. It must be



### Old Galt City Hall

Galt's Town Hall, built of white limestone and blue granite, was erected in 1857, a year after the October 17 public meeting in which a decision was made to build a new structure on the same site as an original town hall, built in 1838 by Alex Scrimger.

That earlier Town Hall was sold for \$130 and put on rollers, then re-located to nearby Cambridge Street where it was converted into a house and still stands.

The architects, H.B. Sinclair and R. Burrows, were chosen to erect the hall with William Graham as overseer. The building followed the 19th century, Italianate public building style.

Officially opened on November 5, 1858, a grand ball followed in the hall (today's council chambers). The party began at 9 p.m., broke for a midnight supper, and continued until 5 a.m.

This photograph appeared in the book "Picturesque and Industrial Galt," published by Jaffray Bros. in 1902.





frightfully cold here on a January night. And hot at noon on a day in early August. What people walked the streets below – Dickson and Ainslie, and nearby Main and Water? And who ventured up these same stairs I have just ascended, to see what they had not seen before?



Generations of Galt’s citizenry have passed by the town tower. Kids, like Jimmy Cranston, knew this hall in the late 1800s. Cranston’s father ran a book store on Main Street. They lived on Shade Street, not far from where the arena would go up some 25 years later.

When the market was on, he and his friends would talk to the farmers and if they were lucky, they’d get a little free produce thrown their way. Years later J.H. Cranston, as editor of the Star Weekly, hired Ernest Hemingway onto the Toronto Star. Galt’s people ventured forth into the world, like Cranston, and touched other lives profoundly.

The view from the clock tower reveals how close our streets and buildings are to each other, how quaint the downtown is, how small we all are. Yes, the years have come and gone quietly, but all the while the

clock has ticked, counting down the final days of the 19th century and more significantly, the final 100 years of the millennium.

There are hundreds of names on the walls. One man, Fred Slee, who was born in 1898, signed his name several times over the years, beginning with the time he went up the tower in 1916 as a mechanic with the Royal Air Force stationed at Camp Borden.

I knew of Freddie Slee. He and Walter Scott, both members of the Galt Fire Department, tried in vain to save the life of Mike Manoogian one hot August day back in 1928 when young Mike, a star athlete and pupil at GCI, had drowned in the Grand just above the dam. Scott later became fire chief.

Slee was there, at the Grand, for many drownings over the years. And he was there, in 1956, when the CPR bridge and a couple



of steam engines came crashing down onto Water Street near GCI.

Yes, I had known of Freddie Slee, and each time I saw his signature on the inside walls of the clock, I looked with reverence.

Slee, still with the RAF, was back up



the tower in 1917. And again on March 31, 1927. Still again, as a member of the fire department, on August 2, 1937. His name graces the wall several more times in the ensuing years. He wrote the name of his newborn daughter, Carolyn Ellen Slee, on the wall in 1937. If the names and dates were ever lost on paper, they would remain on the wall in perpetuity. There

was a permanence to it all, and Slee knew this as he marked the passage of the years and of his life. Once, Carolyn went up and signed her own name, Lyn. And her mother's name, Alexandra – Fred's wife – is also on the wall, though Lyn, now living in London, doubts she wrote it because she hated creepy places.

The names begin in 1888, nine years before the clock arrived. And they continue to the present – compelled by tradition, I wrote my own name as I left. Some summer students working for the city, like Brad Hagen, in 1981, and Sue Readman, the same year, left their names. Jack Murphy and John Williamson were up on December 18, 1952, when the clock was half as old as it is now. The two were installing new lights and they wrote: "Written as the clock is striking 8 a.m."

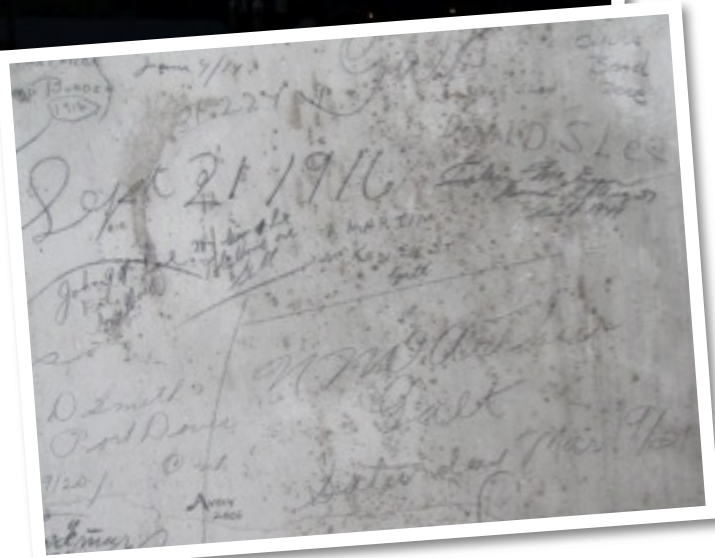
On my first visit to the tower many years ago with former city archivist Jim Quantrell, I read their names as the clock struck 3 on that June afternoon.

Some of the names are familiar to me. Like Billy Everingham. He was my elderly neighbour when I was a child. He wrote his name on June 20, 1938, which was 59 years, almost to the day, from the moment I read his name. He would come to know the clock tower well in the ensuing years when he repaired the eaves and tinwork on the tower. A friend who had moved away to California after the



War, once remarked that if he walked around downtown long enough he was sure to see Everingham. And sure enough, on one of his visits home, he walked down Dickson Street and there, up high on the end of the fire truck ladder working on the clock tower, was Everingham.

Some names are forgotten by time, though I suspect that if we could gather five or six oldtimers around for an afternoon, they could remember everything. What became of A. McCreadie, who, as a member of the 1st Royal Scottish Fusiliers, signed his name in 1928? Did he return to Ayr, Scotland? And what about A.W. Petty from Yorkshire, England? And how about Henderson (the first name can't be read) from Oregon who was here July 12, 1949? Or the Saskatchewan WREN Althouse R.D. from the HMCA Conestoga? Was this Althouse related in some way to John George Althouse, famed educator whose name was given to Western's Faculty of Education building in London. Althouse began his teaching career at Galt Collegiate early in the twentieth century, before



making a name for himself. Born in 1889, he was educated at University of Toronto, and later appointed headmaster of the University of Toronto Schools in 1923; still later he was named dean of the Ontario College of Education 1934 and chief director of education for Ontario in 1944.

And what of Jerry Toner from the Reporter (March 28, 1948)?

Albert Brown, whose son Tom ran F.J. Brown and Son Jewelers, signed his name on March 10, 1930, when he was a cub reporter for the Galt Reporter.



South Waterloo overseas battalion. The date: March 28, 1916.

Just two years before Coleman signed the wall, there was no thought of war. Canada was preparing for the celebration of centennial of peace between the Dominion and her southern neighbor, a centennial that was to be held in 1913. There was no sense of danger. But that would change in July 1914, and within four years there would be millions of deaths by battle, famine and atrocities not to be witnessed again until the Second World War.

In Galt, as in nearby Paris and Brantford, hundreds of people gathered around newspaper offices when the gathering winds of war blew in. Locally, an announcement that British reservists were to report for duty at once, gave early indication of what was to come. Newspapers commenced bulletins of the latest developments. By August 3, 1914, tension was high.

Another name appears from the multitude of names – Scott

*Private William Munn Menary of Galt*

Bartleman. Bartleman, a Galt chauffeur, was 31 years old when he enlisted in the Canadian army on November 15, 1915 during the First World War. He had previously been a member of the Scots Guards, having come to Canada from his native Dinnet, Aberdeenshire, Scotland.

Bartleman, the son of James and Jean Bartleman, lived at 15 Ainslie Street, Galt, when he joined the 18<sup>th</sup> battalion of the Canadian Infantry. He was five feet, nine inches tall and saw action in Europe. But when he signed his name on Galt’s clock tower he had not much time to live. He died August 16, 1917, never seeing his beloved



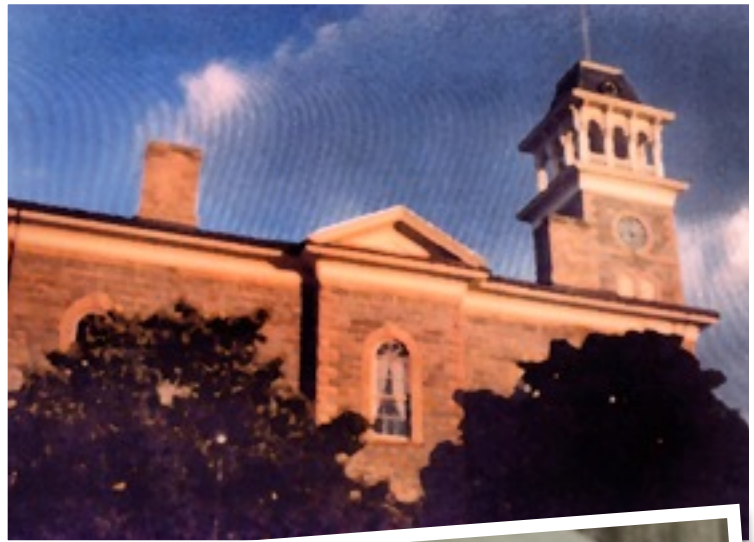
wife, Victoria Bartleman, who lived at McNorman Villa, Forge Road, Southboro, Kent, England.

His signature has endured nearly a century of harsh winters, long hot summers, another world war, and through all that time has barely faded, even if the memory of Private Bartleman is now nearly lost.

His signature is a testament to the fact that he once lived, in flesh and blood, and made the ultimate sacrifice long ago. It is, in its way, a lasting tribute to him, just as is the inscription that bears his name does at the Ballater War Memorial, Aberdeenshire. His name is further commemorated on the south side of the Galt Cenotaph. On the other side of the cenotaph is the name of an ancestor of mine, William Munn Menary, who died of wounds from battle on September 18, 1916 and is also buried in France. William lived at 104 Victoria Avenue in Galt. He never saw his two young children, Esther and Robert, or his wife Emma again.

These are the threads from the signatures on the clock tower wall that resonate with me as I read the names of people like Bartleman and that distant era. I recall spending time at the Galt Cenotaph one day with Fred Sabatine, who was nearly 100 at the time. Sabatine had gone overseas, like Bartleman, Slee, Coleman and Menary, and had returned to tell the tale.

Bartleman is buried in Plot II. A. 18 of the Dud Corner Cemetery in the Pas de Calais region of France. He





1930.

Dud Corner Cemetery stands almost on the site of a German strong point, the Lens Road Redoubt, captured by the 15th (Scottish) Division on the first day of the battle.

The name "Dud Corner" derives from the large number of unexploded enemy shells found in the neighbourhood after the Armistice.

At the cemetery more than 20,000 officers and men who have no known grave are commemorated. They all fell during battles in the area from the River Lys to the old southern boundary of the First Army, east and west of Grenay, from the first day of the Battle of Loos to the end of the war.

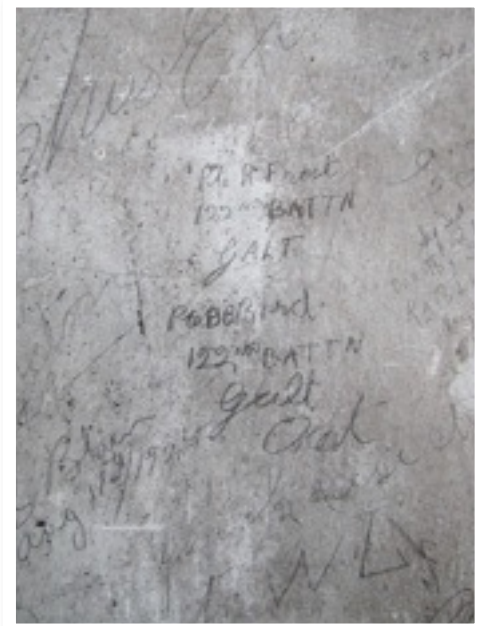
Other names beside Bartleman's fade in and out as we walk around the room. Bill Meyer of Thomas Construction and his son were both here, at different times, helping to renovate the tower. And Len McEwen, of 65 Bond St., had been here. He wrote: "May 10, 1947. Sober." And below was the number 21, circled. Did he turn 21, then the legal drinking age, that day?

John Young, tax collector. Ralph Rock – August 20, 1945. Don Renwick – December 12, 1952.

The latter, Don Renwick, was an uncle to Bill Everingham's wife. Here, in the clock tower, lives intersect just like they do on Dickson and Main below.



"Twenty minutes to eleven," wrote Leonard Clayton Ruby of 3 Cambridge Street, Galt, on Sunday, January 28, 1940, as he left his mark for the ages. I glance up and see Arthur Houghton's name. Later Bill Everingham told me his sister had married Art's brother



and that the brother never returned from the war.

Fred Slee must have enjoyed being up in the clock tower. Maybe he wound the clock. Or helped workers like Everingham with the ladder on the fire truck. Or perhaps, like me, he just liked being in the place where so much history

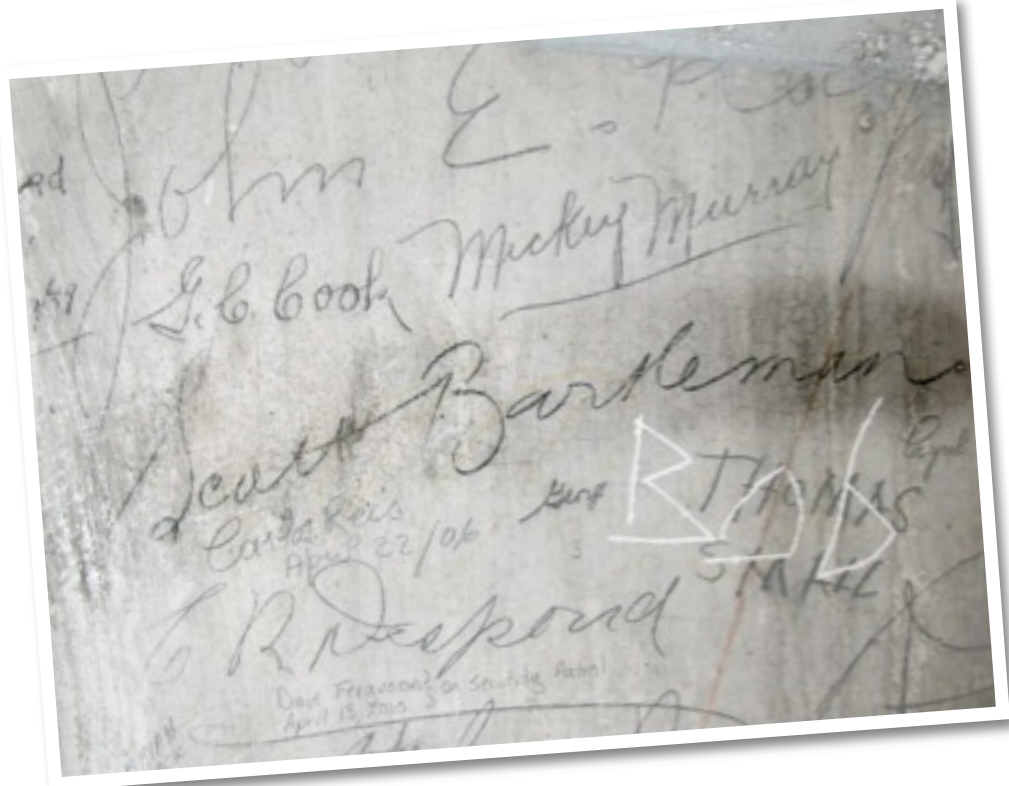


“He was such a softie,” she said affectionately. And sensitive. Once, after a terrible house fire killed Lyn’s childhood playmate Maxine Steel and several other siblings on North Water Street, he couldn’t eat for a week.

When I first wrote this story nearly two decades ago, I noted that Slee died at 70 and was buried 30 years earlier, almost to the day of my visit. He left behind a speech he was preparing, a speech to give at his retirement.

Back then Jim Quantrell and I walked down the narrow staircase, closed the trap door, descended some more stairs. He turned off the light. We left behind the dust, the ancestral smell of the last century, the names on the wall.

When I next visited the clock tower a decade and a half later, there were many more signatures on the wall. Some names had faded in the intervening years. There were names written in pen, in pencil, and some, like Brad Hagen’s – he was a summer



student in the late 1970s – were painted on the wall. For more than a century the people of Galt have heard the bell signal the changing

hours, but relatively few have actually seen inside the tower. Those who have been up the tower remember it, such as Wayne Seeley. In 1959, as a boy, he went downtown to get his bicycle license from the police station, then in the basement of the old city hall. While there he was asked if he wanted to go up the tower. What boy wouldn’t want to see it? He still remembers that short tour of the old stone tower given by the policeman.





The tower inspired local writer Harry Spencer Howell to take a series of photographs just before the dawn of the 20th century.

Howell, who travelled around the world with his wife in the late 1800s—his book, *An island paradise, and reminiscences of travel 1892*, recounts their trip—took shots in all directions, providing a bird’s eye view of the town when the downtown was still partially populated with residences.

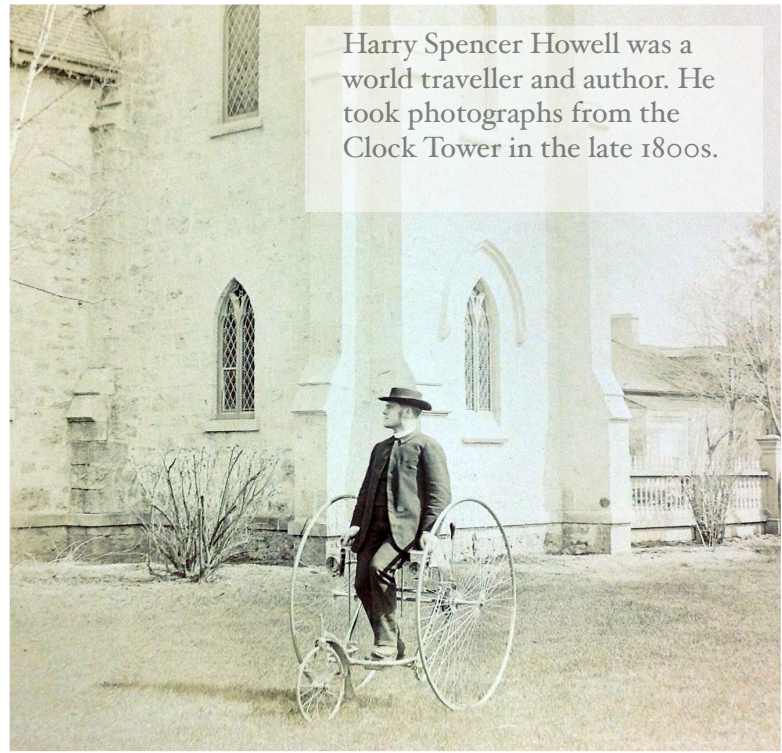
Tragically, after losing his wife and beloved mother, he was killed on August 6, 1912, while cleaning his Lee-Enfield rifle; according to the official report, it accidentally discharged. Howell knew James Paris Lee, the gun inventor who had grown up in Galt and who came back to town to live with his sister for a time on Grand Avenue late in his life.

The bullet passed through Howell’s heart and he died instantly. He is buried in Trinity Anglican Cemetery.

Howell’s Water Street home, Stonyhurst, with its spacious gardens and backyard, was pictured at the corner of Dickson and Water Streets. After his death it was turned into a theatre.

Those views he photographed provide an important historical reference.

In mid-December, 1957, as the finishing touches were being put on Galt’s new Town Hall, America’s most famous ex-slave, Frederick Douglass, came to Galt to give a lecture. Had the Town Hall been completed on schedule, it is likely that Douglass would



Harry Spencer Howell was a world traveller and author. He took photographs from the Clock Tower in the late 1800s.



have spoken there. But given there had been construction delays, he spoke just down Dickson Street at the New Connexion Church. But he saw Galt’s new architectural gem.

The dusty walls resonate with the sounding bell, and speak of a time and place that goes back to the early days of the town. And behind each name there is a story.



Galt author Harry Spencer Howell took these photographs (above and below right) from the Clock Tower in the late 1800s. His home, Stonyhurst, is pictured in the top photo in the centre right.