

WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN BRUCE PARK AND AGH?

The Hamilton Historical Board in conjunction with the Art Gallery of Hamilton AGH will unveil a commemorative plaque in honour of renowned Canadian artist, William Blair Bruce, in celebration of the AGH centennial on Sunday June 8, 2014. This is the story that the plaque will reveal.

William Blair Bruce, the son of William Bruce and Janet Blair, spent his youth at Elmwood, the family home built in 1869. It stood in the southwest corner of the Bruce estate now called Bruce Park. Just prior to the death of his sister, Bell Bruce-Walkden in 1958, what was left of the estate was donated to the city as part of her father's legacy.

William Blair received his early art training from his father and after attending the local Mechanics Institute he was employed as a draftsman. In 1881 he entered the Académie Julian in Paris to study art. Working in oils he became a painter of great versatility and was the most frequent Canadian exhibitor of paintings at the Paris Salons in the 19th century. His canvases include landscape, seascapes, portraits and subject pictures.

Although Bruce lived in France and Sweden, his legacy to Hamilton has been extensive. Upon his untimely death at the age of 47, his widow in Gotland, Sweden, in conjunction with his father and sister in Hamilton, made a gift of 29 of his paintings to the City of Hamilton on condition that a permanent municipal art gallery be established. That modest gallery, opened on June 30, 1914, has become the Art Gallery of Hamilton where the Bruce Memorial Collection is on display.



Photo courtesy The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa

William Blair Bruce and his wife Caroline (Benedicts) in 1895 during a visit to his family home in Hamilton.



Photo courtesy HPL History and Archives

Elmwood, the Bruce family home once stood in what is now Bruce Park at Brucedale Avenue and East 6th Street.

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