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RYMAL FAMILY FOOTPRINTS REMAIN

By Robert Williamson for Mountain Memories

Once-upon-a-time the Rymal family name could be found on 800 acres of prime farmland along both sides of Upper Paradise Road from the escarpment edge to Rymal Road. It is a very large chunk of Mountain real estate. But today, through the natural process of marriage, dispersion and death, the only place you will find the Rymal name is on; headstones in St. Peter's Cemetery, the aforementioned arterial road, a heritage city plaque in Westcliffe Mall and a randomly selected obscure city neighbourhood.

However, I am pleased to report that a Rymal family footprint or two have come to light. Surprisingly, in our modern society's rush to demolish and rebuild, two third-generation Rymal homes have survived. One, hidden in plain sight by extensive remodeling, is located on the north side of Mohawk Road a few hundred yards west of Upper Paradise. A plaque in nearby Westcliffe Mall tells the story of its builder, Joseph Rymal.



Photo by Robert Williamson

Renovated home of former Member of Parliament Joseph Rymal on Mohawk Road West.

In 1751 his great grandparents, Jacob Reimel and Sarah Labar of Alsace, France on the Rhine River frontier of Germany, emigrated to British Colonial America. They probably were German speaking as Alsace has long been a disputed territory and like many European migrants their name was Anglicized to Rymal. Their son, William Rymal was born at Upper Mount Bethel, Pennsylvania in 1759. He married an American, Barbara Long.

After the American Revolutionary War, a number of Mount Bethel (Deutsch) farmers wanted to resettle their families away from the harassment of their revolutionary neighbours. In 1788, William Rymal joined an advanced party of compatriots to stake-out free crown land grants in Upper Canada. They followed the Mohawk Trail to Hamilton Mountain and were amongst the first of the Pennsylvania Deutsch to register their claims.

The second Rymal home is a heritage gem, lovingly restored by its current owners, Amanda and Benoit Robert, who are real estate refugees from the high price of Toronto home ownership. They have found their dream home, an 1860s fairytale cottage built by Joseph's younger brother, Ira. Despite later additions, it has retained much of its original appearance both inside and out.



Photo by Amanda Robert

Located on a wooded rise, the house overlooks the northeast corner of William Schwenger Park, named for a distinguished Hamilton lawyer who was elected to the Ontario Legislature in 1932 and acted as a Deputy Speaker. He was appointed to the Hamilton Parks Board and served as chairman. As such he was responsible for developing many of the city's parks.

Schwenger Park and St. Thomas More Secondary School take up half of Lots 19 & 20 Concession 8, the former farmland of William's son, Jacob Rymal and his youngest sons, Ira and Charles. Jacob's house once stood on the site of the eastern wing of the high school and played a role in the infamous midnight ride of William Lyon Mackenzie during the 1837 Rebellion.



The current home of Amanda and Benoit Robert overlooks William Schwenger Park. The right wing is the original Gothic Revival farm cottage built by Ira Rymal. The remainder is later additions.



Jacob Rymal's house once stood on the present site of St. Thomas More Secondary School.



St. Peters Cemetery Mohawk Road W.