

21 Laidlaw Street South

**The Cannington & Area
Historical Society**

Blacksmith and Carriage Shop



2017

The Blacksmith was an important person in a community before the advent of the car and other modern machinery. Blacksmiths made items out of iron, repaired items and sharpened blades. Farm implements, wagon parts, building materials, cooking utensils, cutlery, hooks and hinges, chains and bells were in their array of tasks. Many blacksmiths were wheelwright makers who also repaired wagons and in small villages the blacksmith not only made the horseshoes but often became the farrier who shod the horses.

Aside from the actual blacksmith business, the shop also served as an important social gathering spot for the men in the community where they could exchange news and catch up on local gossip.

The building at **21 Laidlaw Street South** was built for the purpose of operating as a blacksmith shop as seen by the horseshoe worked into the arched brickwork around the upper story front window. The double doors allowed horses and wagons to enter and brought in fresh air and light.

This building is unique in that it is a three story brick building where both a blacksmith shop and carriage making business operated. Many of its original features remain intact. Very few such buildings remain in Ontario in their original urban locations.

This **21 Laidlaw Street South** building has stood for many years and it gives us a glimpse into the past of the people who worked here and served the residents and visitors of the Village of Cannington. This historical gem received a Heritage Plaque in 2020 to demonstrate its importance in Cannington's early economy and society as well as to honour the blacksmiths who lived and worked here.

Built and Owned

Between 1860 and 1875, this property had a wooden blacksmith shop. In 1881 William H. Hodgen expanded the business to serve not only the community but the visitors staying at the neighboring Queen's Hotel and the Bennett House.

His son William Jones Hodgen took over the property in 1884 and he built the **Blacksmith and Carriage Shop** we see today around 1890.

Mr. Hodgen's business included the Blacksmith Shop on the first floor with two forges and facilities for shoeing horses. The carriage shop stayed at the back of this building where buggies, carts and cutters were built and repaired. The showroom for the carriages was on the second floor. William also tapped into the bicycle craze in the community in 1898 with one of these being the Penny Farthing.



c. 1906

The third floor was the custodian's quarters. He got the fires going in the forges early each morning and was responsible for grooming the horses.

In addition to the custodian there were two blacksmiths, a carpenter, a wheelwright, a painter and Williams's son Earl was the bookkeeper.



1911

William Hodgen

Thomas Henry (Harry) Warrian

Mr. Hodgen's apprentice Thomas Henry (Harry) Warrian took over the business in 1919.

Cameron Walker Cotton took over the business in 1939. He rebuilt the carpenter shop at the back and converted the showroom into a residence for his family. His apprentice and son Ray D. Cotton became the blacksmith in 1956.

During the Cotton's time as blacksmiths, the trade decreased in importance in the community. Ray continued to operate the shop until 1969 when the family sold the building to Erik Hockley-Larsen.

Erik and his family used the living quarters but the lower floor was no longer used as a blacksmith's shop. For Erik, the large main floor shop was perfect to service and repair his airplane, a 415C Ercoupe.

In November 2015, it took 20 volunteers to remove and relocate the plane to Brock High School.



Erik became involved with the Cannington & Area Historical Society in its early days and continued to be a staunch supporter until 2012. Erik understood the value of this heritage building and with his sister Dorritt Meldrum Lundsgaard of Copenhagen, they decided to bequeath his home to the Cannington Historical Society with the hope that this iconic structure could be stabilized and saved.

The Society was well aware that the revitalization effort would be huge and that in its current state it was a property a long way from being a rehabilitated building but recognized its potential and value.



1911 Harry Warrian

Armed with the vision from 1911, the Society set out to restore the distressed diamond in the rough. It took Society volunteers over four years and thousands of hard laborious hours before the structure was sound enough to be considered for a Canada 150 Community Infrastructure Program grant.

The grand opening of the **Blacksmith and Carriage Shop** took place September 30th, 2017.

With a profound appreciation for the original appearance of this building, the Society does not make changes to detract from the original function of this structure or alter that which would adversely affect its historic character.





2017

The Blacksmith and Carriage Shop is full of architectural treasures that convey its rich history inside and out and the history of its homeowners has also been a large part of our preserving process. The Society has fortunately tracked former owner's descendants and while learning about their lives, we have received pictures, original artifacts, and heard stories that would never have been preserved or conveyed in public records.

This building preserves an important link to one of the earliest and most vital businesses in the history of Ontario. It is one of the oldest blacksmith shops in the province that remains in its original location. It is rare that a blacksmith shop structure still exists in its original urban location, as most shops have been lost or moved to a museum setting.

The Cannington Historical Society is a group of determined and dedicated volunteers who *preserve* and *protect to enlighten*. **21 Laidlaw Street South** is an educational venue, a living history museum, and home to the Society and its archives.

September 2018, thanks to a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, accessibility restorations to the carriage shop, including a new washroom were completed.

Join us for a tour and learn more about this challenging but fascinating journey!



To book touring appointments at the Blacksmith and Carriage Shop or at our Historical Museum located in MacLeod Park, visit www.canningtonhistoricalsociety.ca and connect with us on Facebook.