



Castles & KINGS

Ontario Mansions
and the People Who Lived in Them
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RICHARDS' STONE CASTLE, *Snow Road*



The forgotten hills of northern Frontenac, formerly a county, contain some of Ontario's most scenic landscapes. Rolling meadows, ringed with forest show off the simple but well-kept cabins of the early settlers. Well off the beaten path, the area contains no high-speed highways, no malls, no fast food outlets. Rather it is a land of general stores, small churches, and a lively community spirit.

The river that runs through it was a major reason that anybody came here at all. The Mississippi River, a much smaller version of its Yankee namesake, was a main highway for loggers. Most of the tim-



This impressive stone home stood out in an area long dominated by the simpler log and frame homes of the area's pioneer descendants

ber was heading downstream to the large mills at Almonte and Carleton Place. But a number of smaller sawmills were built along its banks as well.

To encourage settlers to clear the land and help provide much needed labour for the lumber camps, roads were surveyed into the hills. Because of the obstacles of rivers and ridges, few of these early routes were straight.

In 1860 the first road surveyor through the area was John Snow, and the road was named after him. At the point where the Snow Road crossed the Mississippi River, Peter McLaren opened up a lumber depot which became known as McLaren's Depot. Here a handful of homes clustered around the store and lumber camp.

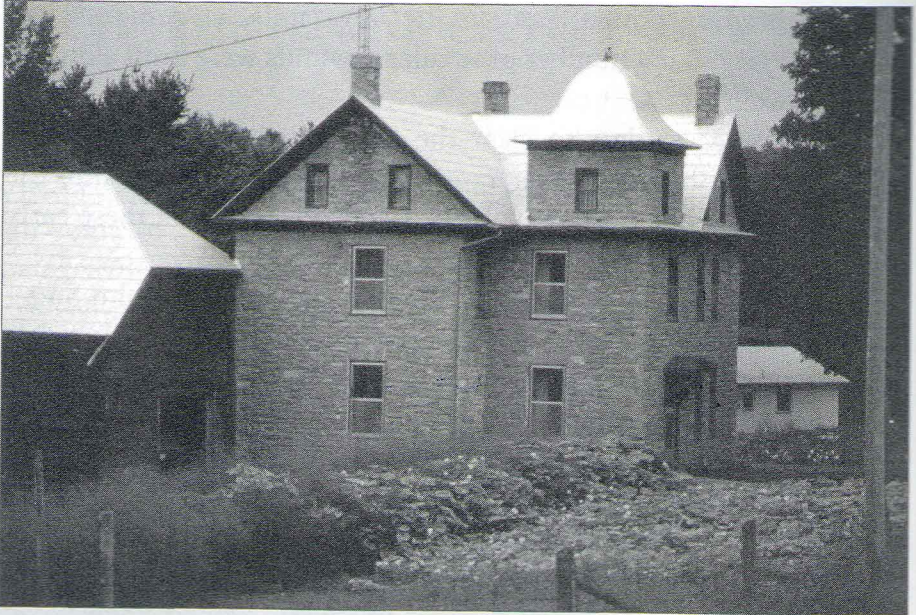
In 1883 the Kingston and Pembroke Railway was built as far as the river where the village of Mississippi Station developed as a temporary terminus. Shortly after, the river was bridged and another station was placed on the north side of the river. Named Snow Road Station, it became the site of yet another village.

Most of the area's early homes were built of logs or planks. While many homes in Perth, then a two day's stage ride away, were built of the ample limestone deposits which hovered near the surface, it was unusual to find such a house in the hills near Snow Road, particularly one that resembled a castle.

Most of the land along the north shore of the river was owned by a local lumber baron, Robert Geddes. It was to this area that William Richards moved from North Adams Massachusetts in 1883, once the railway facilitated travel into the area.

Here he built a three-storey mansion using stone quarried from just across the river. The grand home was offset with a stone tower on the road side giving it a decidedly castle-like appearance and making it the grandest home in the area. Richards' castle took two years to complete and was ready for its "king" by 1889. Inside, a curving staircase led from the spacious foyer to the upper floors.

While the house still stands grandly beside Snow Road, a short



distance east of Highway 508, the area is no longer the tranquil wilderness it was when Richards arrived. Today, vacationers travel in from Kingston and Ottawa to the summer cottages on the river or the shores of Dalhousie and Millar Lakes. Each summer a rollicking music festival takes place in the delightfully named hamlet of Ompah (pronounced Um-pa), and is promoted as the “Ompah Stomp.”

Still, the area is, by comparison, a tranquil escape from the sprawl and gridlock of urban Ontario. ❖

