

Old Burnside, 218 Strathburn Street, Almonte

Compiled by Linda Hamilton for the Mississippi Mills Heritage Committee, May 2015

Dates: Built 1835-40

Style: Georgian with a Gambrel roof

Architect: Unknown.

Original Owner: James Wylie (1789-1854)

Current Owner: Mr and Mrs Howard Campbell.

Construction: Limestone ashlar.

Notable Features:

This is a grand and imposing stone mansion that is one of the first homes built in the area. The home features limestone quarried on site, multiple bedrooms and fireplaces, and many original features. The grounds of this home are also exceptional. It sits on seven acres of forest and garden, enjoys private river frontage, and has a private stream with a bridge and a waterfall.

History:

The original owner of this home was James Wylie (1789-1854). Wylie was a prominent local citizen in what was then Shipman's Mills. He was a merchant, Rideau Canal contractor, postmaster, farmer, and county agricultural society president. He was also a member of the Legislative Council of Canada. Wylie came to Perth from Scotland in 1820 and opened a mercantile business. In 1822 he purchased 200 acres of land in Ramsay Township on the Mississippi River from the Protestant Church and built a log home. This was one of the first homes in the area. He named his property Burnside after the stream and waterfall that run through it. A 'burn' is a small waterfall and this one reminded Wylie of his native heath. Wylie's ten children soon outgrew the cabin, so Wylie built the new home to accommodate his large family. The old log home was incorporated into the second house as a dairy. In the mid 1800s Burnside was not yet located within the town. It was a small settlement unto itself which included a general store, a dairy, and a Scotch whiskey distillery.

In 1841 a traveller to Shipman's Mills made this report of his impressions of the settlement at the falls:

“James Wylie, Esquire, a magistrate and storekeeper, has erected a fine house, his son (William G. Wylie) another. About half a mile from this, Mr. Shipman’s spacious stone dwelling, his mills and the surrounding buildings, present a bustling scene. There is one licensed tavern here, and a school.”

In 1848, Wylie built a larger home, named “New Burnside” next door at what was then 255 Hamilton Street (now Strathburn Street) and moved there. James Wylie's eldest son, James Hamilton Wylie brought his bride to the first house (*see Appendix B: 1881 Census*) and later lived at New Burnside, too. Two of *his* six children, John and James lived at Old Burnside as adults as well. In 1912 Old Burnside was rented to Dr. and Mrs. Macintosh Bell.

Dr James Mackintosh Bell (*see image: 14aJames Mackintosh Bell*) rented the home for two years and bought it in 1914. Born in St Andrews East, Quebec in 1877, Dr. Bell was the grandson of the

prominent Presbyterian minister Reverend William Bell of Perth. Dr. Bell was a soldier in WWI and a scientist, geologist, geographer, author, painter, and lecturer. He grew up in Almonte but travelled all over the world. He was very involved in the mining industry and is credited with discoveries in that field. Known as Mack by his family and friends, he studied at Queen's University in Kingston where he got his MA in 1899. While exploring the Canadian Arctic in 1900, Dr James Mackintosh Bell noticed rocks stained with cobalt and copper on the shores of McTavish arm of Great Bear Lake. He noted this in his notebook. This eventually led his guide at the time to the discovery of enormous uranium resources in that area. Radium was so important at that time, that the resulting mine made a fortune. He was made an honorary member of the Royal Geographical society in 1901 and received his PHD from Harvard in Geology in 1904. He was named as head geologist to the New Zealand Mines Department in 1904. While there he met and married his wife Vera Margaret Beauchamp, daughter of one of New Zealand's most prominent businessmen. Bell fought in WWI where he was gassed and suffered from trench fever. After returning from the war, the Bells moved into Old Burnside. They made many improvements to both the house and the garden, and Old Burnside became known as "Bell's House". Dr. Bell died in 1934 at the age of 57 in Almonte. An article in the Ottawa Citizen (*see images: 14Mackintosh Bell Funeral Description*) at the time of his death clearly reveals what an important and respected person he was in his community. Several hundred people attended, including most of the prominent citizens of the day.

The house was subsequently sold to the Winslow-Spragge family. Theirs was another large family. A wonderful account of life at the house is reproduced below (Appendix A). This was taken from a book by Anne Byers called Life and Letters: Lois Sybil Harrington and Edward Winslow-Spragge (2000).

The Montreal Gazette, March 31, 1948, shows Old Burnside for sale for \$30 000. Describes features and gives brief details (*see images: 15real estate ad 1948*)

Morgan Martin and his family lived there next and they sold to the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Howard Campbell in 1972. The Campbells raised their seven children there. According to an article in The Millstone from July 20, 2012, the Campbells "spent their lives travelling the world as members of the Canadian foreign service. But about twenty years ago the couple decided on a new challenge: They would convert their rambling, 19th century mansion (which The Ottawa Citizen once referred to as "one of the most exceptional houses in the Ottawa Valley") into a bed-and-breakfast."

Apparently there is a story of a "ghost horse" at Old Burnside. The legend is that long ago, during a winter's storm, the horse took refuge in the passageway formed by the double wall built two feet thick to protect the northern exposure, and, unable to turn about and make his escape, was trapped and starved to death. Its' hoofbeats can still be heard on winter nights. (Reference in the Saturday Citizen, Nov 8, 1975)

Hollywood actress Tori Spelling stayed at Old Burnside for five days in July of 2007 while filming the movie "Housesitter" with her husband Dean McDermott. Spelling confirmed a rumour that the couple conceived their son during that time. Old Burnside was the setting for the movie "Housesitter", 2007

Construction History and Current Building:

Please note that I was not able to go inside this building at the time of research. Information is from observations from the exterior (road) and from articles and photographs.

Construction: The main building is symmetrical in the Georgian style. It is three full stories high. It

faces the river (northeast). It has additions on all sides but the front (*see images*) which match the house in style and cladding. However, the limestone ashlar on the main building is coursed, while on the additions it is irregular. On the northwest face, a main floor "flower room" has a sun porch above which can be accessed from the second floor. The "day wing" on the southeast houses a library, music room/study, and has a second floor. This was a more recent addition to the building. Older photographs show no addition at all, and slightly more recent photos show only a single story addition (*see images: 09old_burnside_bell_s_house and 10old_burnside*). A third addition projects from the back of the building. This was presumably the original log cabin that was then converted into a dairy. It is clad in limestone as well. A large outbuilding on the property has garages and more living areas. A bridge crosses the waterfall/stream directly to the northwest of the main building.

Walls: The walls are light brown limestone coursed ashlar. The limestone was quarried on site and is used both outside and inside. A huge slab of rock is also used as a "stage" that leads southwest into the sunken garden. The wood for the framing of the structure was also apparently sourced on site.

Chimneys: There are four end chimneys, two projecting from each flat end wall. Although these chimneys appear to have been modified over time, they are in their original position. A fifth chimney has been added more recently on the northwest corner. Other modern pipes and vent stacks are also present.

Doors: The front door is protected by a wood frame enclosed portico with a transom fanlight above the doorway and a landing with a balustrade on top (*see image: 02front portico*). This portico was altered as well; it was a two story portico at one time, with only the upper portion enclosed. At the rear of the house, three sets of arched double french doors with 12 panes each lead out from the "day wing" onto a sunken patio area.

Windows: At the front, the second and third story windows are double hung sashes with two over two lights while the ground floor windows are four over four. These are evidently more modern replacements of the original windows but they can be seen as they appear today in photos dating from the 1920s. Older photos show three windows on the upper floor projecting from the roof with shed styled dormers overhead. The outer two windows have now been converted into gabled dormers while the central one has been framed with a gambrel shaped roof moulding above it and the wall has been extended up to incorporate the window. Most of the windows have storm windows on the exterior. At the back of the house a few original windows can be seen. They are 12 over 12 lights, double hung windows. Some other multi-paned original (or copies of original) windows are also visible (*see image: 05rear of building*). Various other windows are present as well. A notably beautiful arched, multi-paned window can be seen on the southeast side (*see image: 04window of southeast wing*). The shutters seen in older photographs are no longer present.

Roof: There is a gambrel roof on the main building clad in teal coloured tin. The additions to the southeast and southwest (rear) have hip roofs clad in the same teal tin. The main roofline has been altered through the years. Older photos suggest that the current gambrel roof was created by raising the central peak of the previously extremely shallow upper roof slopes.

Interior: Old Burnside has many original and beautiful features inside as well. Articles written to describe the home as a bed and breakfast go into great detail about these elements. The main house has four bedrooms and a sewing room on the third floor and four bedrooms on the second floor, three of which have fireplaces and views over the "burn". On the second floor, at the top of the staircase, is an archway with a fanlight and sidelights leading to the rear of the house. A tiny staircase serves the

kitchen area and a room that was reportedly Wylie's office. The paneled dining room (*see image: 12dining room*), immediately to the right of the main doorway and hall, was the original kitchen and the old fireplace with its original iron crane still exists. This kitchen hearth, 18 feet of solid rock, is the base of an enormous chimney. There is apparently a bake oven hiding behind the butternut paneling beside the fireplace.

Images:

01exterior: Taken by Linda Hamilton, May 2015



02front portico: Taken by Linda Hamilton, May 2015



03southeast wing: Taken by Linda Hamilton, May 2015



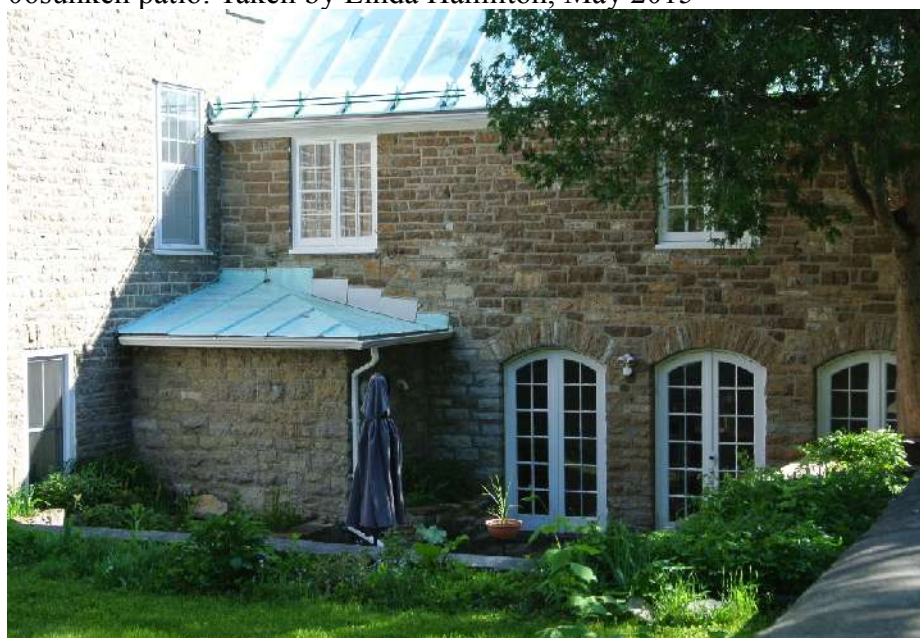
04window of southeast wing: Taken by Linda Hamilton, May 2015



05rear of building: Taken by Linda Hamilton, May 2015



06sunken patio: Taken by Linda Hamilton, May 2015



07from north: Found on BBCanada.com



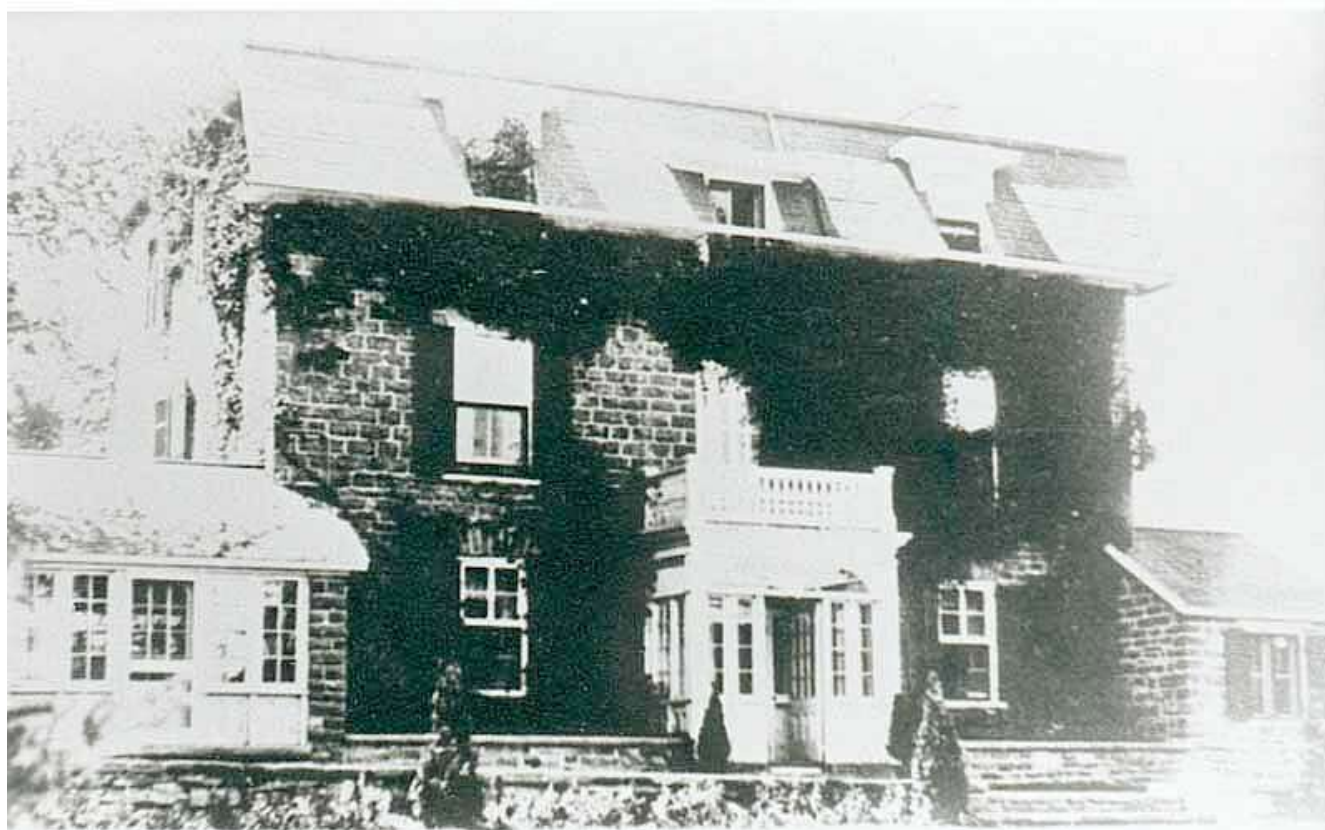
08 modern front: found on <http://millstonenews.com>



09old_burnside_bell_s_house: found on <http://www.almonte.com>



10old_burnside: found on <http://www.almonte.com>



11old burnside_no2: found on <http://www.almonte.com>



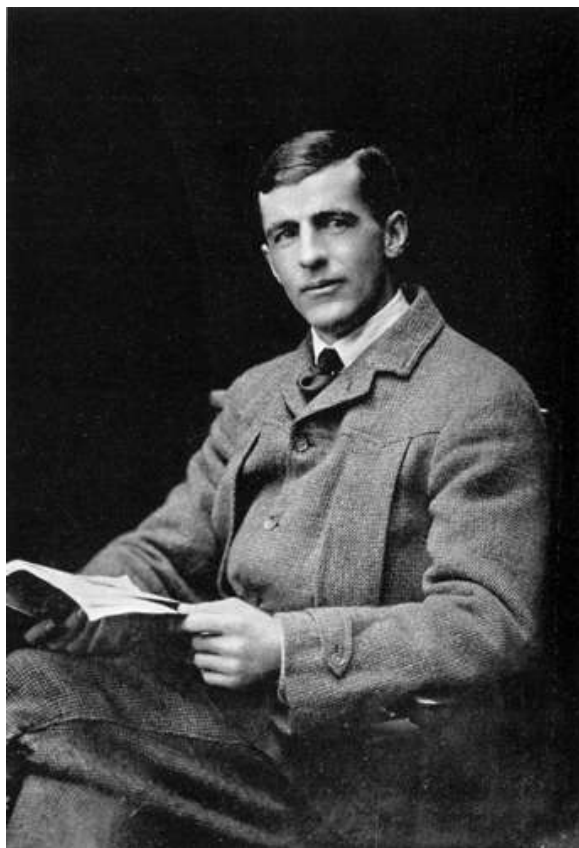
12dining room: found on BBCanada.com



13 taitmckenzie guest room: found on BBCanada.com



14a James Mackintosh Bell



Newspaper Clippings:

14Mackintosh Bell Funeral Description: Hundreds Gather at Almonte to Pay Tributes of Respect to Late J. Mackintosh Bell in the Ottawa Citizen, April 4, 1934.

From Ottawa Citizen April 4, 1934.

Citizen Phones: Queen 5500.

Hundreds Gather At Almonte To Pay Tributes Of Respect To Late J. Mackintosh Bell

Simple Rites Marked By Dignity And Beauty As Great Canadian And Beloved Friend Is Laid At Rest. Old Comrades of 73rd Battalion Provide Pallbearers And Guard of Honor. Service Held in St. Paul's Anglican Church.

(By Staff Reporter.)

ALMONTE, April 2.—Simplest rites characterized the funeral here this afternoon of Major James Mackintosh Bell, M.A., Ph.D., O.B.E., LL.D., world renowned geologist, explorer, traveller, author, soldier and lecturer, who passed away at his home, "Old Burnside," Saturday morning in his 57th year, after a life of color and usefulness and service to his King and country and to his fellow men in Canada and in far-off lands, Siberia, Russian Turkestan, Australia, New Zealand and Manchuria. War comrades attended, but there was no firing party, no funeral oration, just a brief service of marked dignity and beauty.

Several hundreds, including more than a score of his most intimate friends from Ottawa, attended the service in St. Paul's Anglican church to pay their last tribute of respect to Major Bell as a man, who, while he won undoubted fame for his brilliant work in many fields, yet was always best known and most respected for his distinct charm of personality and his unusual capacity for making and keeping friends.

Old comrades of the 73rd Battalion, which Major Bell recruited, provided the pallbearers and a guard of honor which stood smartly at attention as the cortege passed the Almonte war memorial en route to the Auld Kirk cemetery where the casket was placed in a vault, pending interment in the Anglican cemetery later in the spring. The casket was flag-draped, emblematic of Major Bell's outstanding war services for which he was given the decoration of the Order of the British Empire. Many of the floral tributes, which were sent with a wealth of profusion despite the request of the family that flowers be omitted, were placed on the memorial.

The town flags were half-masted as a mark of respect to Major Bell, one of Almonte's most noted sons. While he travelled far throughout the world, his home has been here since his very early boyhood years. The streets of the town were practically deserted during the period of the service and later many citizens stood with bowed heads as the cortege wended its way slowly through the streets to the cemetery.

Major Bell was honorary president of the Almonte branch of the Canadian Legion, member of the Mississippi Lodge, A.P. and A.M., Almonte; president of the Ottawa branch of the League of Nations Society in Canada, second vice-president of the Canadian Geographical Society, and a past president of the General Alumni of Queen's University. Representatives of these and other organizations with which he was more or less closely associated during his lifetime were present at the funeral.

Church Service.

In charge of His Grace the Most Rev. Dr. J. C. Roper, archbishop of Ottawa and metropolitan of Ontario; Archdeacon D. T. Clayton of Perth; and Rev. J. J. Lowe, rector of St. Paul's, the service lasted just a half hour.

Claude Thomson, St. Paul's organist, officiated at the organ and W. H. Morton led the full choir. The hymns, favorites of the deceased, were "The King of Love My Shepherd Is" and "Unto the Hills Around Do I Lift Up My Eyes."

The responsive readings embraced the 60th and the 23rd Psalms. The Scripture lesson was the usual one, the 15th Chapter of the 1st Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians. The committal service was said in the church, followed by the recitation of the Lord's Prayer in unison and the benediction by His Grace. As the flowers were carried from the church, the organist rendered "Days and Moments Quickly Flying" and then the Nunc Dimittis was chanted as the casket was borne from the church.

Resting on the casket were two sprays of lilies-of-the-valley, from the family, and a cross of gold, fashioned by the elder son.

Chief Mourners.

Among the chief mourners were the widow Mrs. Bell, formerly Miss Vera Margaret Beauchamp, daughter of Sir Harold Beauchamp of Wellington, New Zealand; two sons, Andrew B. M. Bell, student at Queen's University, and John M. M. Bell, at home; two sisters, Miss Alice Bell of Ottawa and Mrs. John P. Stairs of Montreal; Jeffrey Gaherty, Col. Gilbert S. Stairs, K.C., and Denis Stairs, all of Montreal, nephews, and Miss Margaret Stairs, Montreal, a niece.

The pallbearers were Allan Jackman, Donald Taylor, Stanley McLennan and James Scott, all of Almonte; and Major William Hooper and Robert Patchell, K.C., both of Carleton Place.

Ottawa Friends Present.

Among the many friends and colleagues present from the capital were the following: Dr. Charles Cammell, deputy minister of mines and president of the Canadian Geographical Society; Charles G. Cavan, chairman of the national executive of the League of Nations Society in Canada; Dr. Oscar D. Skelton, under secretary of state for external affairs; Senator H. H. Horsey, representing the General Alumni of Queen's University; Senator A. E. Fripp, K.C.; H. S. Southam; Capt. Fairfax Webber, representing the 73rd Battalion; Col. G. P. Murphy; J. Lorn McDougall; R. M. Gemmel, O. M. Biggar, K.C.; J. A. Wilson, controller of civil aviation; G. C. Monture, president of the Ottawa branch of the Queen's Alumni and secretary of the Ottawa branch of the National Council of Education; Col. H. C. Osborne; J. H. LeRougelet, first secretary of the British high commissioner; representing the Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, Ottawa branch, Dr. F. J. Atcock, S. C. Ellis, M. P. Gaudet, Capt. H. E. Silver and Archibald Campbell; and E. Stewart McKenzie.

Among Others Present.

Among others noticed at the church were the following: Duncan McArthur, professor of history, and E. L. Bruce, professor of geology, representing Queen's University; M. R. McFarlane, registrar of the pharmacy department, representing the University of Toronto; Bertram Winnett, president of the Queen's Alma Mater Society; Tandy Davoud, president of the Queen's University Student Body; André Dorfman, Toronto managing director of Anglo-Huronian Ltd.; D. A. Gillies, R. L. Gusselle and R. A. Jeffrey, all of Arnprior, representing the National Policy Association; members of Major Bell's mining staff, C. B. Dawson, Dr. A. Matheson and George Mercereau, T. A. Thompson, M.P. for Lennox; Almonte Town

15real estate ad 1948 from the Ottawa Citizen.

"Old Burnside"

Almonte, Ontario

This very handsome suburban, detached residence of three storeys and basement is built of gray stone, Georgian design, and contains fifteen rooms (eight bedrooms), three bathrooms, two washrooms, heated by hot water system (oil and coal). Large reception hall 27 x 16, dining-room 19'6" x 13. Three master bedrooms (two with private bathrooms). Library 22 x 17. This beautiful property consists of about eleven acres of land and has a very fine and picturesque brook running through it. The grounds have been well maintained and are in excellent condition.

\$30,000

The Royal Trust Co.

REAL ESTATE
SALES DEPARTMENT

HA. 4221

DONALD A. BAILLIE, Manager

16for rent Oct 25, 1974 from the Ottawa Citizen.

OLD Burnside Almonte A dignified stone residence on the Mississippi on 4 acres at the edge of town 35-40 minutes from mid Ottawa 4 reception rooms 7 bedrooms and 4 bathrooms Adapted to both formal entertainment and family living For rent at \$550 month with a 3 to 5 year lease The many features for example butternut panelled dining room 40 x 18 drawing room, fireplaces location must be seen to be appreciated Call Mr Emsley collect at 1-257-1405 T909V

Sources:

Online Sources Accessed May 2015

Eades, Erica. Where to stay in Mississippi Mills: Old Burnside. Found on The Millstone at: <http://millstonenews.com/2012/07/where-to-stay-in-mississippi-mills-old-burnside-part-three-in-a-weekly-series.html>

Fletcher, Katharine and Eric Maple syrup and more in spectacular Lanark County. Found at <http://www.chesleyhouse.com/Articles/Copy/200002FYb.htm>

McQueen, Ann Marie. 'Inn Love' welcomes viewers. Ottawa Sun, January 17, 2007.

Harvard University Directory 1913.

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Life and Letters: Lois Sybil Harrington and Edward Winslow-Spragge by Anne V. Byers. M.O.M. Printing, Ottawa, 2000.

The Ottawa Citizen accessed at <https://news.google.com/newspapers>.

Obituary for Dr. James Mackenzie Bell found in The Ottawa Journal April 3, 1934

The Ottawa Journal June 3, 1972.

For an excellent account of Dr. James Mackintosh Bell's life, visit the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, Teara, at: <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3b25/bell-james-abbott-mackintosh>.

Appendix A

From Life and Letters: Lois Sybil Harrington and Edward Winslow-Spragge by Anne V. Byers, 2000. M.O.M. Printing, Ottawa.

Almonte and later years

“This story would not be complete without a few words about what probably was the happiest period of their lives when my father finally persuaded my mother to move to Almonte to a beautiful 150 year old grey stone house known as 'Old Burnside'.

A small river with a waterfall ran through the beautiful garden and cascaded into the little Mississippi River. My father loved to visit the farmer who lived next door and then to walk for miles through the woods along the river's edge. My mother adored the garden and the old house that had originally been a farmhouse with a well and six fireplaces. It had an indescribable Old World atmosphere that inspired her to put her artistic talents to work and create a charming home that overflowed with a feeling of warmth and well-being. Here at last in this beautiful place they were able to enjoy each others' company and to relax and live the life they had always dreamed of. Soon after they were settled, my father's mother came to live with them from Montreal. Her care was very time-consuming, and often in the middle of the night thinking it was time for a party, my mother would patiently wait for her to dress and then take her downstairs to a pretend party. She would give her a glass of sherry and then persuade her that the party was over and it was time to go to bed.

There were many happy family occasions that took place at Old Burnside, the most memorable of which was a New Year's weekend in 1950 when 21 of their children and grandchildren were bedded down in the house each in their own special quarters.

Every last detail was planned to perfection and even included an electric burner on the top floor to make the baby's formulas. The sounds of infants gurgling, children laughing and adults singing were heard all over the house.

There was tobogganing and skating on the river and a memorable sleigh ride complete with sleigh bells which my father made a special last minute trip to Ottawa to procure. Wonderful meals kept appearing which we ate before a roaring fire in the dining room, then followed singing and much merriment. The memories of this New Year's visit are manifold, as are the many other wonderful visits we have all had to Almonte over the years.

After my father died in Almonte in 1953 my mother moved into what had once been the gardener's cottage. Here she could still see the river, the beautiful tall cedars, and enjoy the garden, the birds and nature all around her. She installed another potter's kiln and had a studio where she continued to paint and create pottery almost to the day she died in 1978.”

Appendix B

1881 census for Burnside, Almonte.

James H. Wylie, 56, merchant, born in Ontario. Rebecca Wylie, 51, born in Ontario. John B. Wylie, 22, clerk, born in Ontario. James W. Wylie, 20, clerk, born in Ontario. Mary H. Wylie, 17, born in Ontario. Jessie C. Wylie, 15, born in Ontario. Alexr Wylie, 10, born in Ontario. Cecilia Wylie, 8, born in Ontario.