



Built in Brockville

Accounts of Local Historic Architecture
by **Doug Grant**

Thornton Cliff
Catherine & Reuben Colton House
275 King St. East.
Built in 1854-55

One of the most splendid houses in the east end of Brockville is the one known as **Thornton Cliff**. This “house of many gables” was designed for Reuben P. Colton, a manufacturer of stoves and other foundry products, by William Hay, the celebrated Toronto architect.

Colton came to Brockville from Gananoque in 1842 to set up a new business which he named the **Brockville Foundry**. Although his time in Brockville was relatively short in terms of years, his enterprises had a great impact on the commercial life here. He was one of those businessmen who, through hard work, made, and by accident, lost a few fortunes in his lifetime.

Following his marriage to Catherine Auchinvole of Gananoque in 1850, and during the great success of his iron foundry business in Brockville, Colton began to plan his palatial home on the cliffs facing St. Lawrence River east of Brockville. Construction of the house was carried out in 1854 and 1855. Numerous craftsmen were employed in the stone masonry and the decorative work on the inside. The style is classified as Scottish baronial with Tudor detailing based on buildings in the architect’s native country of Scotland.

In 1858, Colton decided to move to New Brunswick and build a foundry there as well. Following the extensive fire in his new plant, he disposed of the business. He then moved back to Brockville. Severe financial problems in 1863 forced him to sell his Brockville properties including this house.

It was eventually acquired by William H.B. Smythe in 1871. We know scarcely nothing about Smythe except he appeared to live in Chicago, and rented out Thornton Cliff to various tenants over the years.

The Colton residence, as photographed about 1865 by Brockville photographer, Alexander C. McIntyre



In 1901 Senator George T. Fulford, who owned the property next door, acquired this property from the Smythe estate for \$11,000.

Later Fulford presented **Thornton Cliff** to his daughter, Dorothy Fulford, about the time of her marriage to young lawyer, Arthur C. Hardy of Brantford. They were married in September 1904. Senator Fulford, her father, died tragically the following year, following an automobile accident in Newton, Mass, near Boston. When they lived here the property became known as the Hardy estate.



Carmen Hughes, the President of Automatic Electric, who along with his wife Marjorie, lived in and restored ‘Thornton Cliff’ in the 1960s and ‘70s.

A.C. Hardy, was the son of the Premier of Ontario, Arthur S. Hardy, was himself involved in politics as a young man, and was appointed to the Canadian Senate, becoming Speaker of that body in 1930. Dorothy Hardy died in 1949, and Senator Hardy continued to live here until his death in 1962.

It was then sold to Marjorie and Carmen Hughes. He was the president of **Automatic Electric Company**, and they restored and maintained the property in the 1960s and 70s for later owners. It was purchased in 1975 by Guri and Aza Kulikovsky. Guri was a member of the Russian royal family, and a descendant of Queen Victoria.

Thornton Cliff is currently owned by Edgar and Rosemary Sexton who have lovingly renovated this beautiful house for the future.



A view of Thornton Cliff from the river cliffs, taken by George Eland, Brockville photographer.