

POLITICAL UPHEAVAL AND MOUNTAIN HERITAGE 1837

By Robert Williamson

In November 2016, the world was stunned by Donald Trump's political victory. Polls concluded that 70% of Canadians disapproved of the right wing policies, divisive behaviour and ethnic exclusion of the election campaign. Could it happen here? Some people claim that it already did in the Rebellion of 1837.

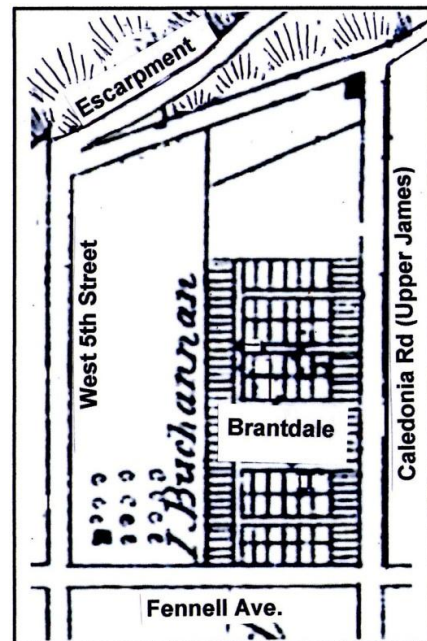
Just one year ago, this Mountain Memories heritage column carried the story of William Lyon Mackenzie's midnight ride across Hamilton Mountain. Reform Party friends helped him escape after an attempted political coup by those who felt excluded from government.

Recently I found in the Dictionary of Hamilton Biography Volume 1, the name of a Mountain politician who was noted for fighting bitter election campaigns. He was described as a "Republican Rabble-Rouser". That phrase caught my attention.

Harmanus Smith, son of U.E.L. Joseph Smith from New Jersey, was born in 1790 in the Niagara region of Louth Township. When granted a medical certificate in physic (art of healing) and midwifery, he moved to Barton Township in 1820. Establishing the **Mountain's first medical practice** at the Terryberry Inn on the Mohawk Trail, gave him access to a stable of horses, and a convenient road system in an expanding pioneer community.

Being one of the few medical doctors in the township, his success, by 1823 was such that he purchased 100 acres on the mountain brow (Lot 15 Concession 4) between today's Upper James, West 5th and Fennell Avenue, better known as Clairmont. To supplement his medical income, Dr. Smith subdivided the eastern portion of his property along the Caledonia Road (Upper James) into building lots. It would eventually become known as the Brantdale Survey. The remaining 54 acres was later sold to a political confederate Isaac Buchanan in 1852 and became the Auchmar Estate.

During the turbulent post-war years as Canada was trying to recover from the War of 1812-15, Dr. Smith took an increasing interest in politics and became a candidate for the Reform Party sitting as a representative in the House of Assembly in York in 1834. Vehemently opposed to the privileged policies of the "family compact" government, he was deemed a radical. Consequently he was defeated by Allan MacNab after the Rebellion of 1837 when society grew to fear the unpredictable consequences of revolt.



Dr Smith's 100 acre land purchase in 1823

Source: Wentworth County Illustrated Atlas 1875

However, with the Act of Union in 1841 uniting both Upper and Lower Canada, Dr. Smith returned to politics serving as a Reform representative until 1860. He would have played a role in policy decisions leading to eventual confederation of Canada 150 years ago. Away from home for long periods, he turned over his medical practice to his son-in-law, Dr. William Ira Case, the son of Hamilton's first medical doctor, Dr. Wm. Case and moved to Ancaster.

Of all his political campaigns, the hardest fought and most bitter was for the Gore District seat in 1856. He defeated the Dundas candidate, the son of pioneer Richard Hatt. At this time Dr. Smith's critics attempted to paint him as unpredictable. Does that sound familiar today?

Mountain Memories, written by **Robert Williamson** for the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society appears monthly in the Mountain News.