



## SCHMITDVILLE STRUGGLES TO BALANCE HISTORY AND NEW DEVELOPMENT

LINDSAY JONES (<http://halifaxmag.com/author/lindsay-jones/>) • NOVEMBER 27, 2015

CITYSCAPE (<http://halifaxmag.com/category/cityscape/>)

**S**chmidville just got some serious street cred.

The small urban pocket of historic homes nestled behind Spring Garden Road is one of the top three best neighbourhoods in the Great Places of Canada contest.

Fourth-generation Schmidville residents William and Christopher Breckenridge entered the contest. “You’re surrounded by universities,” says William Breckenridge. “You can go to the Public Gardens. You can walk to work. You can have a home with a garden. Absolutely every kind of need or want is around you.”

The brothers’ motivation was simple: to save Schmidville from being swallowed by more high-rises. The city is working on designating the area a provincial heritage conservation district with rules about demolition and development, but the plan won’t come into place until public consultation is complete in 2017.

Meanwhile, the dump trucks and diggers are busy redeveloping what was once part of Schmidville between Clyde Street and Spring Garden.

“I just feel that the whole area is getting surrounded by buildings much larger than the little houses,” says Breckenridge, referring to the nine-storey Mary Anne going up on Clyde and Queen streets, its soon-to-be-built twin, the Margaretta, and a controversial 17-storey building proposed for Brenton Street.

Vancouver’s West End beat out Schmidville for best neighbourhood in the contest. Quartier Petite Champlain in Old Quebec was also a finalist.

## WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

In 1781, an Englishman named James Pedley bought about five hectares of pastureland behind Spring Garden Road from Richard Bulkeley, a powerful provincial administrator and one of the founding fathers of Halifax.

The area became known as Pedley's Fields. When Pedley died, he left his land to his daughter Elizabeth and her German-born husband Christian Schmidt, an artillery captain in the British Army.

In 1830, the Schmidts began subdividing the land into building lots and Halifax's third earliest suburb soon became a thriving working-class neighbourhood.

Birmingham Street was named for Pedley's birthplace in England. Dresden Row and Rottenburg, now Clyde Street, were nods to Christian Schmidt's German heritage.

Schmidtville's most distinctive architectural features are the Georgian mirror-image cottages and homes with unique, five-sided Scottish dormers.

Artists, tradesmen, and merchants lived and worked in Schmidtville, including a bonesetter, a baker, a renowned fresco painter and a carriage factory where cars for the city's first street rail system were built.

Some of the city's most prominent citizens lived in the larger, more ornate Victorian homes on the neighbourhood borders. A mayor and a renowned mason lived on Queen Street. Morris Street was home to two premiers, one of whom became a federal finance minister.

*Source: Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia and Halifax Street Names*

## HOMES WITH HISTORY

### 1329–1333 Birmingham Street

Peter Grant from Scotland and his two sons George and Duncan worked as builders all over Schmidtville and are responsible for the area's trademark five-sided Scottish dormers. Grant built this pair of mirror image cottages on Birmingham Street in 1843 for himself.



### 1320 Queen Street

George Fraser, who served as mayor of Halifax from 1881 to 1884, bought this house on Queen Street for \$4,000 in 1872.



### **1350-1356 Queen Street**

Renowned mason George Blaiklock built this pair of townhouses in 1871 on Queen Street. He also built Wellington Barracks at Stadacona and The Presbyterian Church of Saint David on Grafton Street.



### **5561-5567 (tel:5561-5567) Morris Street**

Enos Collins, the founder of Canada's first bank (Collins Bank), built this Georgian home on Morris Street for his two daughters and their husbands. One daughter, Margaretta Collins, married Philip Carteret Hill, who became mayor of Halifax from 1861 to 1864, and premier of Nova Scotia from 1875 to 1878.



### 5633 Morris Street

The most prominent resident of Schmidville lived in this home on Morris Street. William Stevens Fielding was a reporter and editor for the *Morning Chronicle*, where he reported on the sinking of the *SS Atlantic* in 1873. He was elected as a member of the legislature and later became premier of Nova Scotia from 1884 to 1896. He moved on to federal politics and became minister of finance from 1896 to 1911 and 1921 to 1925.



### 1331 Brenton Street




Michael O'Brien took over his father's carriage manufacturing company and moved it to this home on Brenton Street in about 1869. O'Brien's Carriage Factory made horse-drawn carriages that were considered the most fashionable and decorated carriages in town. O'Brien's also made cars for the city's street rail system.



Source: Houses and Stories of Schmitdville (published by Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia)

CORRECTION: Due to a layout error, the final two pictures in this story were in the wrong order in the December 2015 print edition of Halifax Magazine. The layout above has been corrected. We regret the error.

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A freelance journalist based in Halifax, Lindsay contributes to *The Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star*, *Flare*, *Atlantic Books Today* and *The Chronicle Herald* (prior to the newsroom strike).

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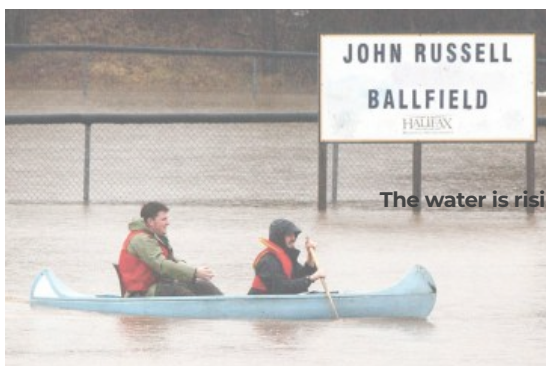


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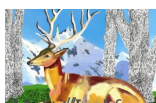
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