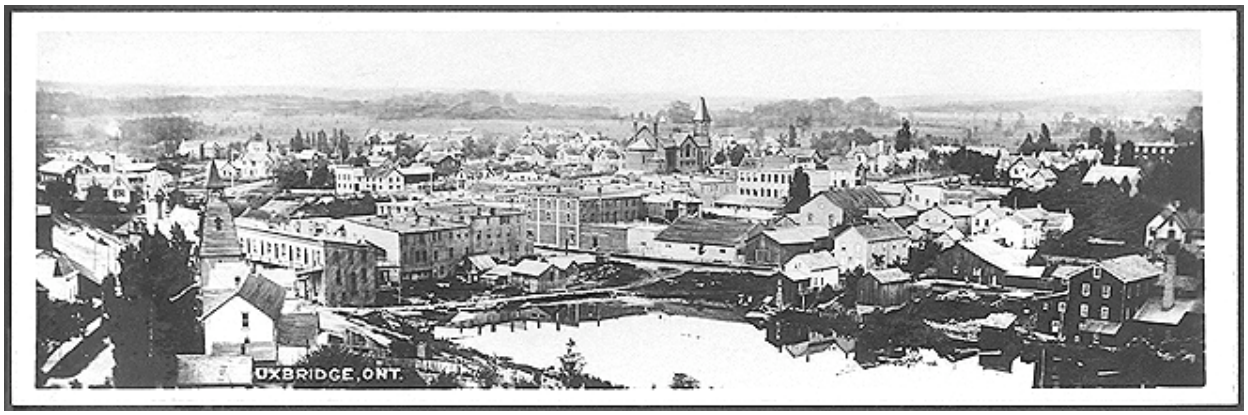
Uxbridge
1806-1837[1]

by *Joseph Gould*



Gentlemen. I am requested to address this club upon the question of the rise and progress of the village of Uxbridge, and while it would afford me great pleasure to discourse for a whole evening with you, upon the rise and progress of a town in which I have spent the whole of my active life in assisting to build up and bring to its present prosperous condition, yet my health is so poor and my voice so feeble that I fear it will fail me before I have finished what little I have proposed to say. But you know my infirmity and will without doubt be charitable. Another thing I must ask you not to be too critical about, that is the dates of the principal events, inasmuch as the history of the village extends over a period of seventy years and upwards, and there being no written statistics to fall back upon, I have been obliged to compile all my remarks from my own memory and while in the main I think they will be found to be correct, yet it is quite likely that some of them will be somewhat astray as to the precise year in which they occured.

I will commence by stating that the first improvement in this town was made by one Christopher Biswick, a Medical Doctor, a little English bachelor that was said to have never weighed more than ninety or ninety five pounds. So we see that great results accrue from small beginnings. Biswick patented the whole lot no 30 in the 6th Concession of Uxbridge in the year 1806, and commenced to build a saw mill and grist mill the next year, on the spot where Whelers' saw mill stands. He got out the timber for both mills and partially built the dam, and then sold out to an old Quaker friend by the name of Joseph Collins who, with his son Joseph, moved in and built a log house a little south of the Mansion House. This was in 1808. Then, Joseph Collins the elder sold the East of the lot 30 to Jo-

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[1] This transcript of a hand-written lecture on Uxbridge by Joseph Gould recounts the history of the area from early settlement until the Rebellion of 1837. The lecture was discovered by Allan McGillivray, curator of the Uxbridge-Scott Museum & Archives, in the vault of the Uxbridge Library - a library bearing the name of Joseph Gould who was responsible for much of the "Rise and Progress of the Village of Uxbridge". Further information on Gould can be found in *The Life and Times of Joseph Gould* by W.H. Higgins. [See also: Canadian Friends Historical Association (CFHA) Journal #45, summer 1989]

seph Collins from whom I got the above particulars. He informed me that he worked for Collins all through the building of those mills, and if my memory is not at fault, the dates they were built as stated above are those that he gave me.

Young Collins having married Anna Bogart, a sister to the late John Bogart of Bogart Town, came in with some considerable means, and being an energetic man, soon finished up the mills and cleared up a small farm and built a frame barn upon it. The frames of those mills and barn would now be considered quite a curiosity in their way, among framers of the present day. They were all framed by the old "scribe veile", if not before the square rule was discovered, it was before it was put in practice in this country. The mode of framing was to frame each bent by itself, by laying it down the full size and scribing and framing each stick for its proper place, and marking and numbering each stick so that they could put them together again in the same way.

I may remark here that Robert Willson patented Lot 29 in the 6th in 1806, and settled on it in 1807. His house stood a little south of Isaac Gould's barn, and its location is now within this corporation but formerly was not considered in the village. The sawmill was a little old-fashioned mill, built very cheaply, and ran with a schroud wheel, and would probably cut 700 or 800 feet a day. The grist mill was of the most primitive kind, with a pair of native rock stones about 3 feet 6 inches in diameter, made by the late Stephen Hilborn, and run by a small breast wheel.

But small and insignificant as those mills would now appear, they were amply sufficient for the wants of the neighbourhood for so many years. For the settlement was very small, consisting of only about eighteen families which I may name, although outside of the question in hand, yet it may interest some of their descendants. I will note the names of the first settlers, and the concession and lot on which they settled. The first, Robert Willson lot 29 in 6th, Joseph Collins 30 - 6th, Jonathan Gould 32 - 6th, Ezekiel Roberts 33 - 6th, Thomas Hilborn, Stephen Hilborn & Amos Hilborn 35 - 6th, George Webb 19 - 5th, Elijah Collins 21 - 5, James Hughes 22 - 5th, Charles Chapman & Isaac Chapman 28 - 5th, William Gould 31 - 5th, Ezekiel James 32 - 5th, Samuel Haines 34 - 5th, Job Webb 35 - 5th, Samuel Siddins 3 - 4th, and these constituted (with not more than three additions) the whole settlement for about fifteen years. Europe had been in a turmoil of war with Napoleon for a long time and there had been no immigration from this source. And although there had been a strong current of immigration from the United States, partially settling Markham, Vaughan, King, Whit-church, East Gwillimbury, Uxbridge, Pickering, and Whitby, many of whom were Quakers settling in King, Whitchurch, East Gwillimbury, and Uxbridge, and when the War of 1812 broke out, those parties, in vindication of their principles, refused to bear arms or contribute in any way to the war, consequently they were fined and stripped of their chattels, and some of them put in gaol. And many that were not Quakers, rather than fight the Americans, left the country and all they had in it, and their farms were confisticated. This war dried up that current of immigration from the United States, and it has never revived to any extent since, hence the stagnation of the settlement of Uxbridge.

But the most fatal blow that befell our village in its early life was the death of Joseph Collins Jun. who was killed in his sawmill on the fifth day of December 1815. The manner of his death was most tragical. He was running his sawmill the day before his death, and the ice had accumulated on the Pitman from the splashing of the creek, and when the mill stoked, the crank would stand up plumb, caught by the ice building between a post and the pitman, and the saw gate was up as far as it would go. And in the morning, finding the

mill froze fast, Collins laid down across the beam under the saw gate, and with his axe leaned down to knock the ice off of the pitman, but as soon as that was done, the wheel turned bringing down the saw gate across his back, holding him there between the saw gate and the beam till he died; at least, this was the conclusion arrived at, at his death.

As I said before, the death of Collins was a severe blow to the village of Uxbridge. He was a very enterprising man, and had he lived, would no doubt have built up a town here much earlier than it has been done. But he died intestate, leaving one daughter and two sons, and the old primogenitor laws of England was then the law in this province by which the oldest son inherited all the real estate. And John Collins the oldest son, a lad of two years old, became the heir-at-law to all the real estate, which consisted of the deed in fee of the E_ of 30 in 6th, and the household of the whole of 31 in the 6th, then a Clergy Reserve.

Mrs Anna Collins, the widow, with her three children, removed back to her father's farm near Newmarket where she married again and raised another family, and dying has left them well off. John Collins, the heir-at-law, has raised one family, lost one wife and got another, and is now living in North Gwillimbury. And Joseph Collins, his brother, is now and has been Town Clerk and Treasurer of Whitchurch for over thirty years back.

This much I felt bound to say for the family that made the first practical improvement in this village of Uxbridge.

John Bogart, the uncle of John Collins, took out letters of administration for this property and administered it for the heir-at-law during his minority, and rented the mills and farm to different parties from time to time for about 17 or 18 years. At the time of Collins' death, there had been no addition to the village or the settlement, nor was there one settler in the Reach, Brock, or Scott. Mr Bogart put Stephen Hilborn in possession of the mills for a short time; at first, it was rented to a Dutchman by name of Abram Meride(?). He had it two or three years, then Robert Widdifield rented a year or two, then Stephen Hilborn had them again for a short time, and then Amos Hilborn rented them and continued to hold them till the year 1831, but how long each one of those tenants occupied the property, I am unable to say. But there was no improvements made upon the Collins property while they occupied it, save a little log house and a log blacksmith shop which John Lyons built in 1827, a little south of Michael O'Neil's smith shop north of Brock Street.

In the spring of 1826 a permanent acquisition was added to the village by the arrival of John P. Plank, a wide awake Dutchman from York state, who located the W 1/2 of lot 30 in the 7th and built a little frame tavern, I think a little west and a little south of Alonzo Planks' present house. And being a jolly good fellow "which nobody could deny", and with his beautiful clean tidy dutch wife one of the best house-ladies that ever cooked a turkey or broiled a beef stake, they soon established for themselves a house and reputation that has served the family as passport to the present time.

By this time a strong current of immigration had set in from all the British Isles, and the Townships of Brock, Thorah and Mariposa had began to settle, and the only road by which they could be reached was through Uxbridge, and Mr Planks' house became the nest place for all the emigrants that settled in those townships, and he began to pick up money pretty fast. And by this time, the Collins property mills and all had gone into complete delapidation without any prospect of being renovated, as it was several years yet before the heir would become of age so as to improve or dispose of it. And Mr Plank, recognizing the necessity and importance of having saw and grist mill accommodation, con-

ceived the idea of buying out Robert Willson, the owner of lot 29, and built a saw and grist mill on the sites upon which the Gould saw and grist mill now stands, and succeeded in inducing Joseph Chapman to buy the grist mill privilege and build the grist mill, while he, Plank, would buy the saw mill privilege and build the saw mill. This I think was in 1828. They both made the purchase, and Plank in the course of two years built the saw mill, which I think was started in 1830, but Chapman failed to complete his contract but sold out and moved to Pickering. About that time, Carlton Lynd, a young merchant from Whitby, came in and started a general store, not far from where Elonzo Plank's house stands. This was the first store ever started in Uxbridge.

Mr Plank's saw mill was not a success. It was badly arranged and crudely built, had very little power and less speed, and the dam, being built on a pile of logs with dry sand, broke away frequently till in the spring of 1832, it broke and undermined the mill, completely disheartening Mr Plank, so that he could not be induced to rebuild it, but allowed it to lay idle during the whole summer of that year. The whole neighborhood urged Mr Plank to rebuild his mill dam and repair the mill but like all shrewd Americans, finding himself in difficulty, determined to shift his burden on some one else to be carried. But not being able to induce any one acquainted with such property to buy it, in looking round for a purchaser he found a young man in the neighbourhood, a carpenter, who knew very little about mill property and less about the ways of the world without education or any knowledge of business.

A very inconsiderate venturesome fellow, mostly acting on first impressions, frequently jumping into difficulties and depending more upon his hands than his head to get him out, he knew well what it was to work, but he knew nothing what it was to fail and determined never to learn; him, Mr Plank induced to purchase his sawmill and 42 acres off the east end of 29. And he came in, in the fall of 1832, and rebuilt the dam and repaired the saw mill. Thus, Joseph Gould drove his first stake in the village of Uxbridge which he has never been able to draw out though frequently trying to do so. Although Mr Gould had repaired his mill dam as he thought all right, yet, he had not sawn one log when it broke again as bad as ever, and being so late in the fall that it had to lay over till the next spring when he rebuilt it, and sawed some four months when it broke again and had to lay over another winter. He then sold it to a Bagshaw, and for his right got a bond for a deed of no.5 in the 6th Scott. But the following spring, he rebuilt it and it has remained good ever since. But what with the breaks each of which cost $200, and two years lost time of himself and the mill, left him heavily involved. This was the spring of 1834 and at this time a young man by the name of Joel Bardwell with his cousin Rufus Bardwell from York state who had rented Plank's Hotel the fall before, bought out the Collins property for $1200 and paid $200 upon it, and made some repairs to the grist mill. But Rufus Bardwell, who was the lad to come over from the states and who had all the money, seemed to be very much wanted back again by some acquaintance he had over there, and in order that he might not miss his way in going back, one of those acquaintances called on him with the Deputy Sheriff and Constable one evening, and offered him a safe conduct back to his friends pledging themselves to take good care of him by the way. To this (Mr Bardwell not being destitute of the characteristics of his country men) returned them the greatest thanks and gratitude for the kind consideration they had manifested and the interest his friends had taken in him, and the love and affection they had for him, and could well understand their anxiety for his return, and that he had fully made up his mind to go back and visit them in a week

or so, but that he should take pleasure in going back with them, that he was aware when he came away that some of his friends were needy, but that now he had plenty of money and would make them all happy the moment he got over there. But said he, "You shall not go out of this house tonight," and said to his son, "Put up those gentlemen's horses, and tell the horster to groom them well, and have them and my two best horses well fed in the morning for you will have to go with me as far as Toronto with them tomorrow." "Now gentlemen," said he, "have something to drink, and have supper and take your rest, and I will get ready and we will have an early start in the morning." But Mrs Bardwell was uneasy, and she said in the presence of the constables, "What's all this hurry about Rufus?" He replied, "It's all right, it's all right. Those men want me to go with them to the states and I am going in the morning. It is a little sooner, you know, than I intended to go, but I want that matter settled and I have the money and I may as well go now as any time." This gave the constables total confidence in mine host, who treated liberally, and they drank freely, and got to bed gloriously, and slept long and soundly.

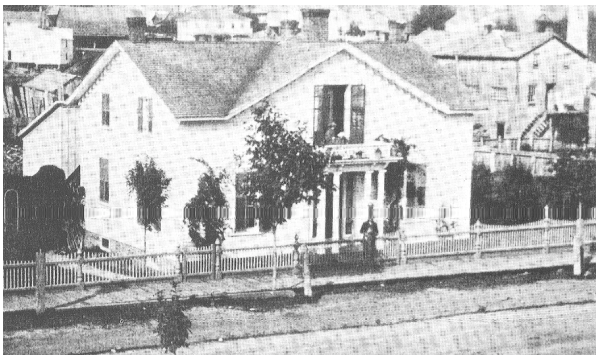
In the mean time, Rufus was not idle but with his son Silas, and an American who had two race horses at his place at the time, they fled not wishing to disturb the constables, not even to bid them good bye. And late in the morning the constables got up, to find breakfast all ready for them, and after a leisurely meal they inquired for mine host and were told that he had gone out for a short time, and after waiting some time, and making further inquiry, and an investigation of the premises, they found that Rufus and his son with their horses and the American with his horses had all fled before midnight. They therefore saddled their horses and wended their way back to Toronto, sadder and wiser men than when they came the night before.

Mr Bardwell and his racing friend with their horses scoured the country all round, racing and gambling at all the spring races, and exhibited their trophies of some 20 or 30 watches and other trinkets won at the races for a month or more and then returned to Uxbridge. He commissioned Joel Bardwell to sell out the Collins property which he did, and the purchaser was Abram Anderson who is still living on the west end of 30 in the 6th. And Joel Bardwell then purchased Mr Gould's grist mill privilege with 107 acres of that farm now owned by Mr Gould. He made no improvements on it except to build a little log house at the turn of the road opposite the head of the mill pond, and after occupying it for a year or two, he too was wanted for some special purpose, and Mr Scripture, the Bailiff, called on him to accompany him to Toronto, and this time Mr Scripture determined that his bird should not slip out of his hands, at any rate not till he had picked his feathers off, and therefore purchased the 107 acres from Bardwell for a consideration, the amount I was never able to learn. Further than that, Scripture admitted that he gave him a good new suit of clothes and otherwise fitted him out in good running trim, the truth of which I was never able to dispute, for on their way to Toronto, each on horse back, in the thick woods near the Roughs Hill, Bardwell slipped off the horse and ran into the woods and unfortunately, or fortunately for Scripture, he never could reach him. But it was known shortly afterwards that he had joined his cousin Rufus in Michigan.

Before Mr Bardwell bought the Collins property, Mr Robert Taylor had purchased one acre off of the north east corner of it (the site of the Plank house), and built a store upon it and done a smashing business for a time. But failing, the property fell into Mr Plank's hands and is now some of the best business stores in the village.

In 1835, Abram Anderson having purchased the Collins property, come in that spring and repaired the grist mill and built a

new saw mill and a good one for the time. He induced Joseph Bascom to come in and purchase the site and build a tannery, the one lately owned by Mr Parrish. He also bought from Anderson all the land to the east of Wheler's Mill Pond, except the one acre owned by Mr Plank, and nearly an acre reserved by Anderson for a log yard fronting on Main St., and now owned by John McGuire and Henry Tompson, with the little old drug store between them. Mr Bascom was a thrifty honest industrious business man, and established shoe shops in connection with his tannery and was a great acquisition to the place. And in the year 1836, between him and Anderson, they got a weekly mail route through from Duffins Creek to Brock, and Mr Bascom was made the first Postmaster in our village. And at that time, and for 7 or 8 years after, there was no road connecting the east side of the creek with the west side excepting over Andersons, now Whelers mill dam, and Mr Bascom built his tannery fronting on the mill dam and had his first post office in the tannery. But his first dwelling house was a little log house that he built, which I think is still standing on the north part of Michael O'Neils village lot that he lives on, and must have been standing there near forty-six years. His next dwelling was a frame house that he built on the west end of Dr Bascom's lot. About 1836, Joseph Marslond came in and built a little tavern and a blacksmith shop on the spot where the late Joseph Finch's tavern and sheds stands.



The Joseph Bascom House on Main Street, 1863

By this time, Anderson had got three or four little frame houses built on the south side of Brock St over west of Church St, and had also got a small school house built on the old school house grounds. Those houses were occupied by Anderson's labouring men, and in the commencement of 1837, the houses on Anderson's property on the west side of the creek would be about 7 not to exceed 8. And on the east side, there was Mr Plank's Tavern and driving house, and Boulton Lind's store, then empty, Bascom's tannery and dwelling house, Taylor's store on the site of Plank's Hotel, and a little cooper shop on the road opposite John McGuire's house owned by an old Yankee runaway by the name of Thomas Arnold. And this, as near as I can recall, constituted the whole of the village of Uxbridge in 1836 & 37. The merchants that had started in business here had all failed or moved away. The grist mill was of the poorest possible description. Anderson's saw mill, not being kept running, cut very little lumber. And Mr Gould's mill was kept running cutting an average about 9000 ft. a week, supplying all the early settlers in Reach, Brock, Scott, Uxbridge, and some in Mariposa, and some in Thorah, besides considerable clear lumber of the very best quality which he sold at the mill at six dollars a thousand, and yet his stock accumulated as the countryside did not require one half.

But the village was not an exception to the other posts of Canada in the stagnation of trade and improvements, for there was general stagnation and want of confidence everywhere, for the Canadas was then and had been for several years involved in one of the greatest political struggles that any young country was ever afflicted with, and while it is not my intention to give you a political lecture on the state of the province, as it would be outside the question in hand, but some of

you young men may very reasonably query in your minds as to what the blighting influences could have been, that should for near thirty years keep a most disirable plot for a town, in a central position with a good water power, surrounded on all sides with good land, and that land covered with a dense forest of the most valuable timber the world ever produced, from becoming a large town.

My answer is, that the first check to improvements in this village as well as to the country at large was the American war of 1812 which put a stop to immigration from the United States, while as yet, there was very little immigration from Europe. And the next fatal check to this locality was the tragical death of Joseph Collins who built the first mills. But the most blighting influence of all, that destroyed all confidence and put a check to all enterprise, was the irresponsible system of government that was then and had for a long time been governing the country. This government consisted of a Lieutenant-Governor appointed by the Crown in England, an Upper Chamber of Legislative Council as it was called, also appointed by the Crown, an Executive Council of six ministers appointed by the Governor, and a Legislative Assembly elected by the people. But it was not necessary that these ministers should be elected and hold seats in Parliament, as at present. Nor were they or the Governor in any way responsible to Parliament for their acts, nor had Parliament any influence over the Legislative Council. Therefore, the people's representatives under that system had no controlling influence in the government of the country or in the administration of public affairs, nor ever could they get their most popular measures to become law, for all bills had to be passed by the Legislative Council and sanctioned by the government, and any bills that the government took exceptions to, if they got through the Legislative Council, were sure to be vetoed by them. But the Legislative Council, being the creatures of government, was mostly called on to check any measures the government did not want to pass, and they generally done that part of their duty most effectively. I have known the legislature to pass some of their most necessary measures year after year for several years, before they would become law. For instance, the secularization of the Clergy

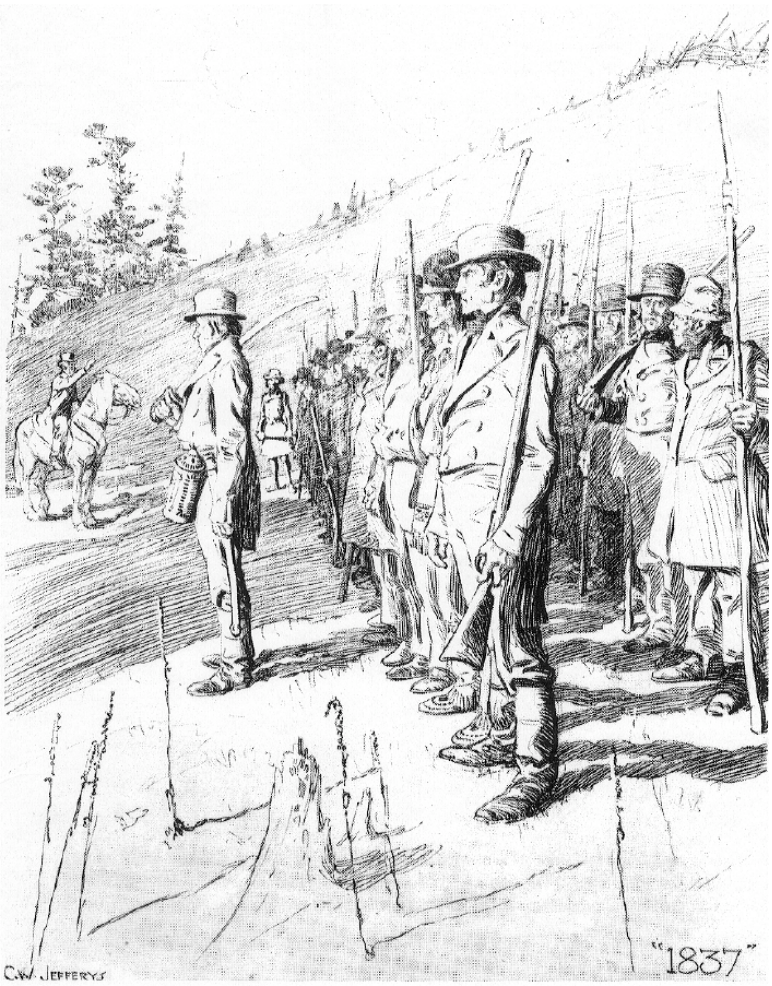
COLONIAL ADVOCATE.

YORK, THURSDAY, MARCH 21, 1833.

Provincial Parliament.

Reserves bill was passed no less than thirteen times during the thirty years of its agitation.

Nor had Parliament any control of the patronage of the Crown. The governor appointed who he pleased, and who he pleased, he dismissed with or without the advice of his council. Thus the office of a minister was a mere nominal thing and carried no responsibility with it. If he recommended a candidate for office, he must be such a one as the governor would approve of, or he would not get appointed, and in time there grew up around this system a set of Tory syncophants, ready and willing at all times to defend the governor and his administration no matter how much it was against the interest of the province, so long as they and their friends could hold office, and they took care that none but their relatives and such special friends as would befriend them on all occasions should get appointed. And so thorough and so long had they carried out the principal, that for a quarter of a century, this oligarchy got the well-earned name of the Family Compact, a name which will have a place in Canadian history in all times to come. And so blighting and paralyzing on the energy and enterprise of the country, that Sir Francis Bond Head, in one of his dispatches in contrasting Canada with the United States in 1836, said that she stood like a girdled tree by the side of the thriving forest. But this system so hostile to the interest of Canada, so foreign to the constitution of England and so repugnant to the liberal institutions of the United States, did not escape without challenge in Canada, and for many years a great agitation had been raging for constitutional reform, and many able men had been ruined and fell before the Hydra-headed monster, the Family Compact; and all that could sell and get away were leaving the country, as they are now. But Wm Lyon McKenzie had for several years with his pen and his paper been a thorn in the side of the Family Compact, and just at this time in our history, he had lashed the Country into the convulsions of rebellion against them, which culminated in an open rupture in the fall of 1837. And in this uprising, the principal land proprietors of the village took more or less part. Mr Gould and B. Plank joined a large party from Brock and went down to Montgomery's, about seventy strong intending to share in the honor of taking the city, and in revolutionizing the country. In this we failed, for while we did actually take the city, the city actually took many of us. - I say we



failed, but there is such a thing as to lose to win; and this problem I think I shall be able clearly to demonstrate as I proceed farther with this history.

I have also said we did not actually take the city, but that the city actually took many of us. And this was true as well of the landed proprieters of this village, as of some hundreds and thousands throughout the province everywhere. Mr Anderson, Mr J.P. Plank, Mr Bartholemew Plank, and Mr Gould, all found a resting place in Toronto and was fed at the public expense. But Mr Gould, for the want of more convenient accommodations, had the honour on this occasion of making his first entry into the parliamentary arena by being ushered into the Legislative Council Chambers in the House of Parliament and had for his (?) a trusty old soldier, a brother-in-law to Squire Bagshaw. I have said that those men were fed at the public expense - yes; and they was guarded too at the same expense, not so much to keep them from getting out as it was to keep others from getting in to them, for no man was allowed to get in to see them, not even their wives or sweethearts, without a permit from the mayor, an alderman or an officer of the guard. And now, since I have got our village brothers so safely and comfortably housed, I propose to leave them resting there, till on some future evening, if all's well, I will release them, and exhibit them before you, and give you as correct an account as I can of what they, with others, have done to promote the rise and progress of the village and the country around it.