

Library Archives Corner



'In your last letter you said you were going to have a room of your own and I suppose you will be glad, I was not satisfied until I got a room to myself.'

- Walt Green,
(in a letter to Aubrey Holmes dated Nov. 8, 1891)



Exterior of Officers' Mess showing attic window.



(L to R) Colin MacLock,
Cec Berezowski, Mark Miller

This quote came to mind as I peered into a tiny makeshift playroom in the attic of the Officer's Mess (Bldg. 1027) in Work Point, where Walt Green's letter and fifteen others like it, were discovered by Mark Miller of BCEO. It was February 19, 2004, and my colleagues, Mark Miller, Cec Berezowski and Colin MacLock, and I were looking for clues to explain the presence of these letters. There were rumours that this building would soon be torn down and we didn't want to overlook any nook or cranny where other letters might be hidden.

Our adventure began on October 29, 2003 when these letters (which were written between April 2, 1890 to February 5, 1892), along with a sketchbook signed 'Anna Holmes', an 1891 seed catalogue, a notebook with 'Bank B.C. July 7' (1892) written on its cover, several children's magazines, three cardboard collars, a leather glove, a torn tie with red lines on it, and a black cloth dickey; were given to our museum. When the collection was presented to me, all these items were rolled up together and covered in soot. Nobody had attempted separating the pages because they were afraid to cause damage. I was also perplexed as to what I should do with these papers so I put them in a plastic bag until a solution might present itself.

One day in early February, I casually mentioned these letters to Colin MacLock, who is actively trying to save the building. He spread the word and soon we were getting requests for the letters. Something had to be done, and one of our archive volunteers, Karen Rogers, was willing to do it. She carefully brushed off the soot and separated all the pieces of paper. She then placed acid-free paper between the sheets and put the lot in an acid-free box. I then examined the letters and compiled a box list. But several things remained unanswered. Who was Aubrey Holmes (the recipient of these letters) and what was his link to the Officer's Mess?

We concluded that Aubrey Holmes was the son of Lt. Colonel Josiah G. Holmes, who was Commandant of 'C Battery Artillery School' at the time these letters were written. The place where the letters were found is near a trapdoor that separates the attic from the hallway, on the second floor of the easternmost residence. As a corner residence, it would have offered it's occupants privacy and a spectacular view of the harbour (making it an obvious choice for the senior officer). Aside from this small room in the attic (which is built around the easternmost attic window) the only other partitions occur as firewalls spaced 1/3 and 2/3rds the length of the attic. It is apparent that this room was built for the use of L/Col. Holmes' children and that these letters were hidden there by his children and forgotten. Years later they narrowly escaped destruction when fire scorched the rafters in the eastern half of the attic. A hundred and fourteen years, after they were written, these letters give us insight into how people lived in Barrie, Woodstock and London, Ontario (from where they originated) as well as the first residents of the Officer's Mess, which was completed in 1891.

Joseph Lenarcik

For further information on the efforts to save Bldg. 1027, please write to:

The Work Point Arts Project Group
485 Head St., Victoria, B.C., V9A 5S1
or phone Colin MacLock at 388-4090.



Drawing by John Scratchley

