

The Way We Were

The House That Jacob Built

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Part 1

How many times have you passed by the stately old stone house on the north side of Sanders Boulevard at the end of Binkley Road and wondered about its origin?

In the 18th century, the area was part of Upper Canada. George III was King of England when the original Crown land patent, dated 1796, granted

900 acres to the Johnston sisters, Jemima, Sarah, and Mary, daughters of Chief (Lieutenant) Brant Johnston, a white man who had married an Indian woman. That same year, the Johnston sisters sold the West Hamilton portion to John Mackay.

The Binkleys purchased 800 acres from John Mackay in 1803 and gave their name to Binkley's Hollow. They were Palatine Germans, forced to leave their country for religious reasons. Hans and Mary Binkley emigrated from Switzerland to England and later to America, landing in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1735, where they settled in Lancaster County. In 1783, after the War of Independence, their son Marx Binkley (1748-1805), with his wife Magdalene and family of three boys and two girls, spent two months traveling in Conestoga wagons, originally bound for Kitchener. But when they reached the mountain brow at the top of Horning Road and stayed at the home of Abraham Horning, the beauty of the valley below them was irresistible, so they decided to start a new life there.

Marx Binkley and his family cleared land for crops that was heavily wooded with oak, maple, black walnut, pine, spruce, and hickory. Log cabins were built from the materials at hand. Later, impressive homes



Binkley House.

Photo: Loreen Jerome

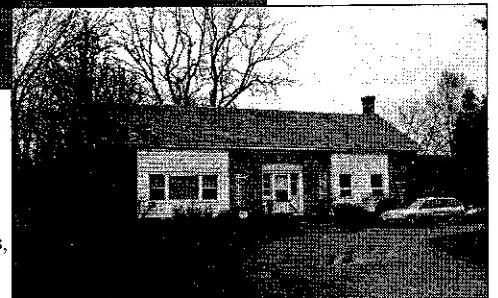
were constructed with limestone quarried from the escarpment. This was a time when settlers, after a hard day's work, had to stand guard through the night fearing not only thieves but also attacks by wolves, bears, and wildcats on their sheep, pigs, horses, and cows.

Jacob Binkley (1806-67), great-grandson of Marx, built the handsome stone house that still stands at 54 Sanders Blvd. at the head of a ravine. The house was completed in 1847 and named Lakelet Vale, as it had a little spring-fed lake at the rear. Binkley's Pond, as it was known, was used for skating, fishing, and good times. It is now the Zone 6 parking lot at McMaster University on the west side of Cootes Drive.

A tree-lined avenue, now Binkley Road, ran to the house from Dundas Road, now Main Street West. Some of the property's trees, such as magnolias and tulips, were rare in the district. The nearby carriage house for the cutters and carriages also housed implements for a carpenter and blacksmith shop. A large wooden barn 100 yards west has long since disappeared.

Love of one's surroundings often leads to the desire to be buried nearby.

Common practice at that time among farm families was to be buried on their own land, and in this instance the Binkley families left two local cemeteries as part of their lasting heritage.



Binkley Coach House

Photo: Loreen Jerome

Part 2 of this story will identify other Binkley houses and the legacy this early family left for future generations.

Sources: Herbert Fairbairn Gardiner (compiler), *Gardiner's Scrapbook*, Vols. 77 and 102; A. Anderson and Grace Buttrum (compilers), *Other Days, Other Ways: Historical Sketches of the Binkley School District*; David N. Jardine, *West Hamilton, a Village and a Church* (Hamilton: West Hamilton Heritage Society, ca. 1990).