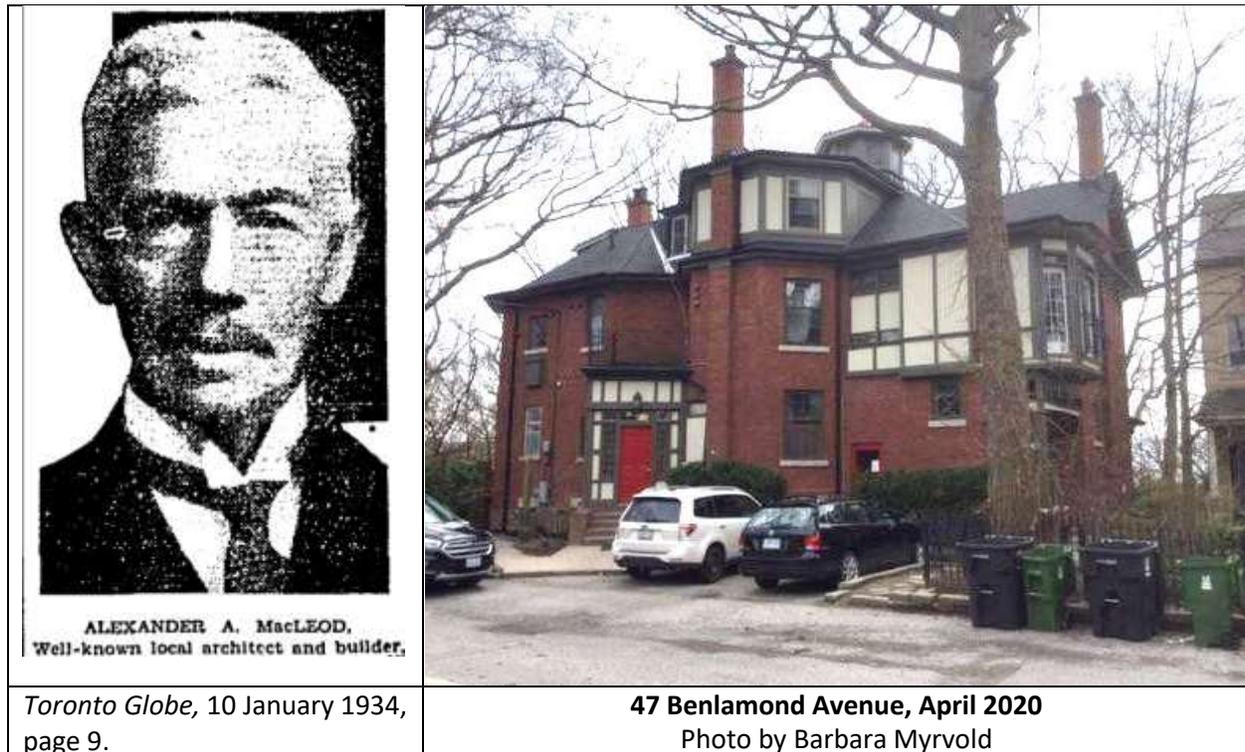


Alexander Angus MacLeod, his family and his buildings on Benlamond Avenue.

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Alexander Angus MacLeod (1855-1934) was once a well-known local architect and builder in East Toronto where he lived for 40 years, from about 1894 until his death in 1934.

His work can best be seen in a group of dwellings that he constructed or renovated between 1909 and 1918 in an enclave on the south side of Benlamond Avenue near its terminus at Norwood Road and Glen Oak Avenue. Two of the buildings are heritage-designated: 47 Benlamond Avenue, which MacLeod built (probably to his own design) in 1909,¹ and 57 Belamond Avenue – 6 Benlamond Drive, built in 1873-6 for Rev. William Stewart Darling;² no. 57 was the MacLeod family home for about 40 years, 1910-1950.



Part 1. Alexander MacLeod and his family, 1855-1950

Part 2: Alexander MacLeod's buildings on Benlamond Avenue and vicinity

Part 1. Alexander MacLeod and his family, 1855 to 1950

Early life in Scotland and Canada, 1855-1893

Alexander MacLeod was born on the Isle of Skye, Inverness County, Scotland in 1855, and was a son of John MacLeod (1821-1901), a merchant, and Euphemia Macpherson (1821-1903). In the early 1860s, Alexander came to Canada with his parents, his younger brother Malcolm Hugh MacLeod (1857-1928) and his younger sister Euphemia MacLeod (1859-1940). While the family name was often spelled “McLeod”, the correct form is “MacLeod”, as is carved on their gravestone in St. John’s Norway Cemetery.

By 1881, the five MacLeods were living in the village of Fenelon Falls, Victoria County, Ontario. In the census of that year, Malcolm MacLeod, now 22, was listed as an engineer. According to his biography, he was educated in public and private schools in Pennsylvania and New York and started working in railways in 1878. Over his illustrious 55-year career, “the eminent engineer” (as he was described in 1924³) rose from “[axeman, chainman and rodman](#)” to vice president of the Canadian National Railways; it was said that he “laid out more railway mileage than any man in the world”.⁴

Twenty-four-year-old Alexander MacLeod’s occupation was “labourer” in the 1881 census and “carpenter” in the 1891 one. The Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada has an entry for an “[Alexander McLeod](#)”, which notes that he was recorded as “architect” of several ecclesiastical and residential works in Fenelon Falls. The first was a house on Helen Street for himself in 1883, followed by another residence on Oak Street in 1895 and two churches - St. Andrew’s Presbyterian (1895)⁵ and St. James Anglican (1902, where he also did the woodwork⁶) – as well as plans for a town hall (1899) that was not built.

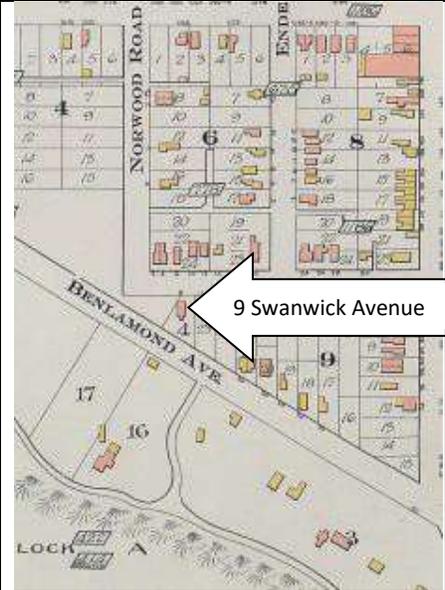
Although our Alexander MacLeod lived in Fenelon Falls for part of that time and later was called “architect and builder,”⁷ he relocated to East Toronto in the mid-1890s so one questions if the later projects, at least, were his. However, a search of the census records for Fenelon Falls in 1881 and 1891 indicated that there was only one Alexander McLeod living in the village at those times. Perhaps he commuted by train between the two places, a distance of 145 kilometres, enjoying reduced rail fare through his brother.

Early days in East Toronto, 1894-1908

Alexander MacLeod was first recorded as a resident of East Toronto⁸ in the Toronto city directory of 1894, listed as “McLeod Alexander, carp McMillin & Costain b G C Wiggins”.⁹ McMillin & Costain was a firm of local builders and developers whose principals were Andrew McMillin (1864-1931) and William Costain (1863-1937). The pair had met in Liverpool and immigrated to Canada together in 1886. In 1892, McMillin & Costain had their first listing in the East Toronto section of the Toronto city directory. Before long, the firm constructed several important buildings in East Toronto, notably Emmanuel Presbyterian Church (1894), Mary Street School (1897) and Hope Methodist Church (1900). Eventually they developed much of the block bounded by Main Street, Bridge Street, Enderby Road and Gerrard Street.

In 1895, Alexander MacLeod had two directory listings - “McLeod Alexander, carp I Gerrard” and “McLeod John, I A McLeod”. These records indicate that Alexander no longer worked for McMillin & Costain, his family had joined him in East Toronto and they lived in a rented property on Gerrard Street. City directories continued to list the MacLeods on Gerrard Street until 1899, and then starting in 1900

on Swanwick Avenue, first identified as being at no. 9 Swanwick in 1907. However, in November 1897, the *Toronto World* reported, “Mr. Alex McLeod is erecting a large brick residence on Swanwick-Avenue.”¹⁰ This may have been at No. 9 Swanwick Avenue, although the house did not appear on a Goad’s atlas until 1910.



9 Swanwick Avenue, April 2020

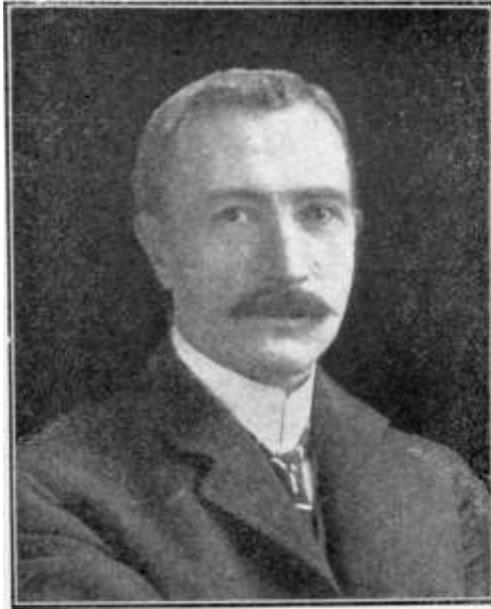
Photo by Barbara Myrvold

The atlas shows MacLeod’s brick house on Lot 4, the last one on the south side of Swanwick near its terminus with Norwood Road. The lot extended to the north side of Benlamond Avenue.

[Detail, Plate 111, Goad’s Atlas of Toronto, 1910.](#)

The 1901 Canada census recorded that Alexander McLeod [sic], age 45, was a building contractor working on his own account. He headed a household comprised of his father (“living on his own means”) and his mother, both age 80 years, his sister, age 40, and a four-year-old nephew, Malcolm Plaw McLeod, born on 24 January 1897. The boy’s mother, Emma Plaw (1876-1897), had died a week after Malcolm’s birth in Arnprior, Renfrew County, Ontario.

Young Malcolm’s father, Malcolm Hugh MacLeod, left his infant son in the care of his family in East Toronto (his sister Euphemia MacLeod probably was the child’s primary caregiver), while he advanced his railway career. He had left the service of the CPR in 1900 to take the position of Chief Engineer, Canadian Northern Railway. It was later said that he was presented with “a handsome testimonial” by Prince Arthur of Connaught when he toured over the Canadian Northern in 1906.¹¹



[Malcolm H. MacLeod, 1911](#)

Significant changes continued in the MacLeod household in the early 1900s. John MacLeod died on 18 October 1901 at age 80 of senile decay. An obituary noted that “he died at the residence of his son Alex McLeod on Swanwick-avenue....He was born on the Isle of Skye and came here 35 years ago.”¹²

Alexander MacLeod was married at age 46 on 27 November 1901 at Victoria County, Ontario to Catherine (Kate) Smith, a 34-year-old dressmaker from Lindsay. Their only child, Euphemia Elizabeth (Phemie) MacLeod, was born at East Toronto on 7 September 1902.

Euphemia Macpherson MacLeod died of old age at Swanwick Avenue on 3 November 1903. Her obituary recorded that she “was 81 years old, a member of the congregation of Emmanuel Presbyterian Church, and very highly respected....One of the sons is M. McLeod of Winnipeg, chief engineer for [William] [Mackenzie](#) and [Donald] Mann; the other is Alex McLeod the contractor”¹³

Although he never held political office in East Toronto, Alexander MacLeod took swift action when he felt the democratic process was not being respected. Early in 1904, it was later reported, “a strong agitation was raised in the town ... in favour of annexation to Toronto.”¹⁴ A petition with a few hundred signatures was presented to East Toronto Council that June asking that an annexation bylaw be submitted to the electors. When Council refused, alleging that some of the petitioners “had been induced to sign by incorrect statements,”¹⁵ Alexander MacLeod took the municipality to court in July and won his suit.¹⁶ At the end of September of that year, the court ordered East Toronto Council to take the annexation vote within four weeks from October 3.¹⁷ The question was submitted to voters on October 26, but it was defeated by the narrow majority of 13 votes. Nevertheless, the Town of East Toronto was annexed to Toronto on 15 December 1908 adding 593 acres and 4,800 people to the city.

Alexander was involved in his community in other ways. In January 1908, he was elected to a three-year term on the Board of Managers of Emmanuel Presbyterian Church¹⁸. The church was a few doors east of the MacLeod home on Swanwick Avenue where the family continued to reside until about 1910.

Evidently, Alexander's construction work was not confined to East Toronto. In June 1905, for example, he was issued a building permit for a pair of semi-detached, brick-and-stone dwellings on the north side of Hepbourne Avenue near Delaware Avenue in Toronto.¹⁹

Move to Benlamond Avenue, 1910-1920

In 1907-09, MacLeod acquired two adjacent properties (Lot 16 and Lot 17, Plan 422) on the south side of Benlamond Avenue. The two large lots were prominently situated to offer spectacular lake views and to overlook a scenic ravine known as "Ben Lamond Park," so named for Benjamin Morton and James Lamond Smith, who registered the "Benlamond" subdivision in 1876.²⁰

In the decade after acquiring these two lots on Benlamond Avenue, MacLeod developed his holdings. He converted an existing dwelling into two residences, and constructed, renovated or expanded four additional structures: a detached residence (47 Benlamond), an apartment house (49 Benlamond) and two duplexed dwellings (45 Benlamond), one detached and the other semi-detached. He also built a house for Emma Davis at 66 Benlamond Avenue in 1911 and a residence for John A. Brady at 43 Benlamond Avenue in 1917.

Shortly after acquiring Lot 17, MacLeod divided the existing house at the top of the ravine, which had been built in 1873-6 for the Rev. William Stewart Darling, into two dwellings. No. 59 (now 6 Benlamond Drive) on the west side was sold, and MacLeod and his family moved into no. 57 on the east side. The latter address first was listed in the 1911 Toronto city directory, although the MacLeods lived there by May 1910, when the *Toronto Globe* reported, "The regular meeting of the East Toronto Study Club was held Tuesday at the home of Mrs. McLeod in Benlamond avenue."²¹



[57 Benlamond Avenue, 2010?](#)

Bob Krawczyk/ToBuilt

In 1911, Canada's census recorded that the household at 57 Benlamond headed by Alexander MacLeod, a 53-year-old builder, included his wife, Catherine, age 43; their daughter, Euphemia, age eight, as well as his sister Euphemia and his nephew, Malcolm P. MacLeod, now 14.

Alexander reported on the census that he had worked as a builder for 50 weeks, 48 hours a week, the previous year, earning \$800. This was a fraction of the \$10,000 that Alexander's younger brother, Malcolm H. MacLeod of Winnipeg, earned as the General Manager and Chief Engineer of the Canadian Northern Railway, a position he obtained in 1907.



Malcolm Plaw MacLeod
Toronto Star, 2 February 1918.

As previously mentioned, Malcolm P. MacLeod had lived with his uncle's family in East Toronto since birth. He attended Kimberley School and University School (University of Toronto Schools, UTS), was active at Emmanuel Presbyterian Church, and "was distinguished in all manly sports, being a hockey, lacrosse, football and baseball player, and winner of many prizes in athletic competitions."²² Malcolm was a 20-year-old student in February 1917, when he and seven other classmates (including D. Laurier Sisley, 2 Main Street) were recruited to serve in the Royal Flying Corps. After training at Camp Borden and Leaside, Flight Lieutenant Malcolm MacLeod left Toronto in February 1918 for overseas. He is credited with seven victories as a pilot during the First World War.²³ He was twice decorated, awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, also the Croix de Guerre, Belgium.²⁴ He returned to Canada in March 1919.

With young Malcolm MacLeod away at war, his uncle created a flat in his house at 57 Benlamond Avenue; from 1918 to 1921 Alexander MacLeod shared the listing for 57 Benlamond in the Toronto city directories with Harry A. Dawson, a traveller.

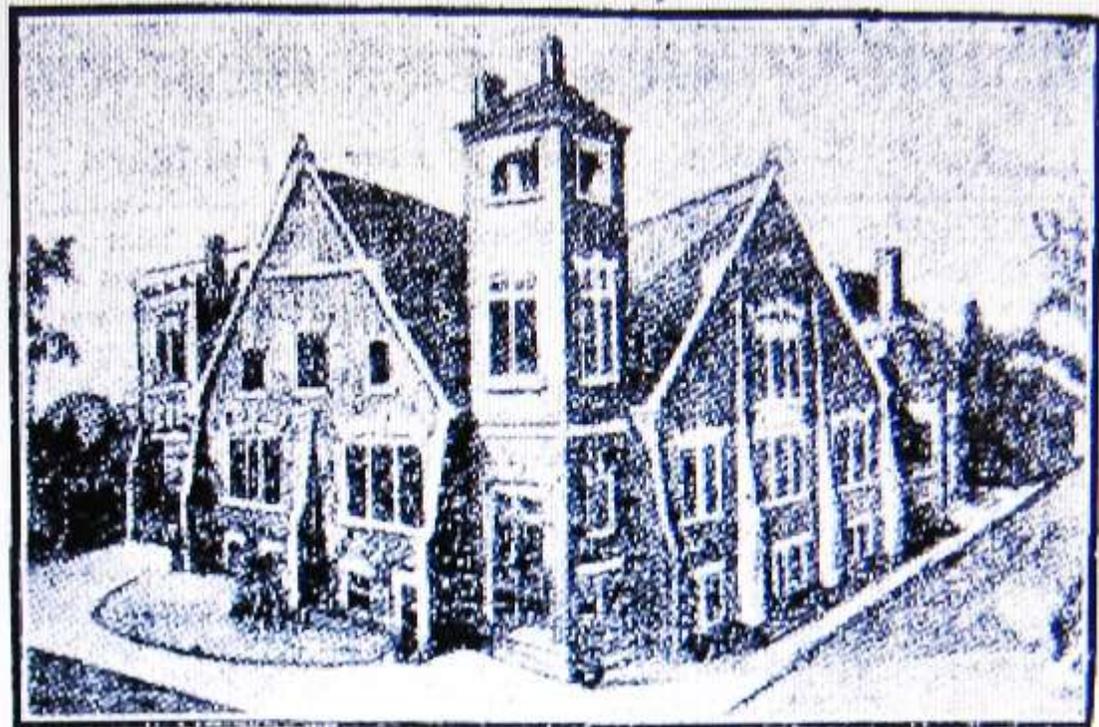
Later years, 1921-1934

Seven members of the extended MacLeod family were in residence in the nine rooms of 57 Benlamond Avenue when the census was taken in June 1921 including three women named Euphemia: Alexander's daughter, a student age 18; his sister, age 53 and his sister-in law, Euphemia Smith, a teacher age 65. The other residents were Alexander himself, wife Kate, nephew Malcolm Plaw MacLeod, age 23 and now a University of Toronto student, and brother Malcolm Hugh MacLeod, who in 1923 was appointed as the vice president in charge of construction of the Canadian National Railways.

Three in this group were married during the 1920s: Malcolm Plaw MacLeod in 1924 to Alberta Lucille Taylor; Malcolm Hugh MacLeod in 1926 to Ella May Taylor (his daughter-in-law's widowed older sister, 32 years his junior!) and Euphemia MacLeod to Herbert H. Blakeman, an insurance agent,⁵ on 11 September 1929 in the drawing room of her parents' home at 57 Benlamond Avenue.

MacLeod was a Presbyterian until 1925 when he supported church union and left Emmanuel Presbyterian Church to join Glenmount United Church, formerly a Methodist congregation. In May 1925, he was elected to a two-year term on its Committee of Stewards.²⁶ He supported the church's efforts to construct a replacement building on Gerrard Street East at the southeast corner of Golfview Avenue. In August 1925, a garden fete was held on MacLeod's Benlamond Avenue property and \$300 was raised. At the church's opening ceremonies on 12 October 1926, he was presented with a bouquet of

chrysanthemums in appreciation of his work supervising the construction of the \$50,000 building.²⁷ No architect is listed for Glenmount United Church's new building in the City of Toronto Archives building permits file²⁸, but MacLeod was an experienced church designer and probably contributed to the plans.



NEW GLENMOUNT CHURCH TO BE DEDICATED

"New Glenmount Church to be dedicated". *Toronto Star*, 26 September 1926.

Malcolm Hugh MacLeod died suddenly of coronary thrombosis on 9 February 1928 at 353 Rosedale Heights Drive, the house he commissioned Toronto architects Sproatt & Rolph – not his brother - to design for him and his bride in 1926. "Railwaymen representing all roads in North America" assembled in Toronto for his funeral, the *Toronto Globe* reported, "a mark of tribute to a railroad builder whose life had been spent in the development of Canada."²⁹ He was buried in Mount Pleasant Cemetery.

Alexander MacLeod died six years later, on 8 January 1934 of cancer at his home at 57 Benlamond Avenue. The *Toronto Globe* noted his death with a portrait and a brief note: "Alexander A. MacLeod. Well-known local architect and builder, who passes away at his residence, 57 Benlamond Avenue, Monday, after a long illness. He was in his seventy-ninth year."³⁰

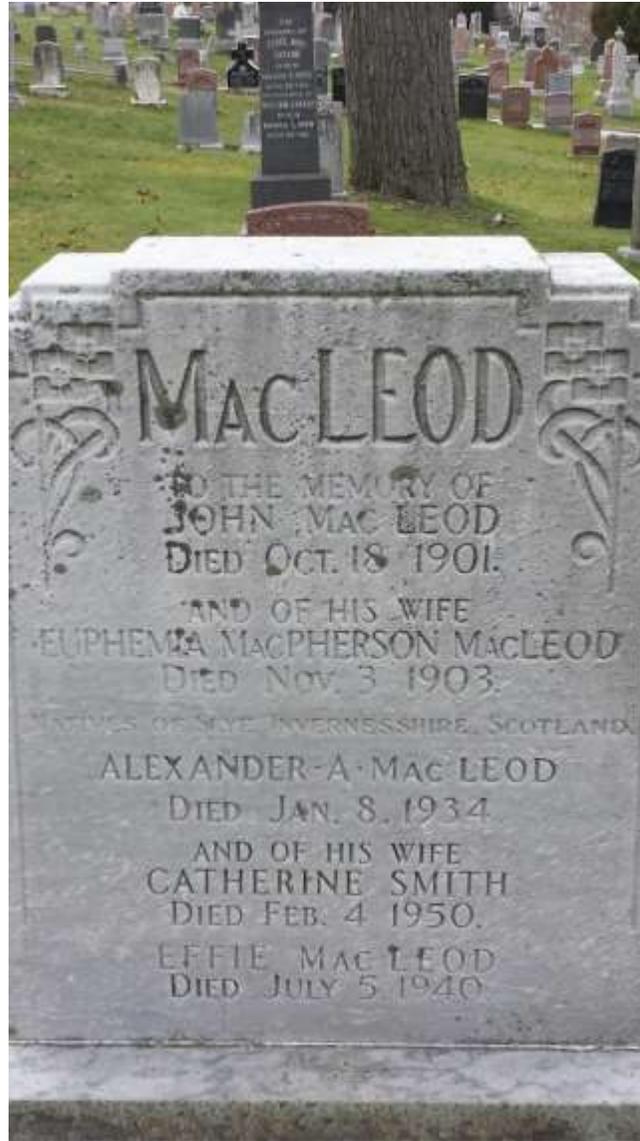
Alexander Angus MacLeod, 1855-1934.

<p style="text-align: center;">CALLED BY DEATH</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">ALEXANDER A. MacLEOD. Well-known local architect and builder, who passed away at his residence, 57 Benlamond Avenue, Monday, after a long illness. He was in his seventy-ninth year.</p>	<p>MacLEOD—Early on Monday morning, Jan. 8, 1934, at his home, 57 Benlamond Avenue, Toronto, Alexander A. MacLeod, beloved husband of Catherine Smith MacLeod.</p> <p>Funeral from the above address on Wednesday afternoon at 2 o'clock. Interment in St. John's Cemetery. Kindly omit flowers. 22</p>
<p><i>Toronto Globe</i>, 10 January 1934. page 9</p>	<p><i>Toronto Globe</i>, 10 January 1934. page 10</p>

End of the MacLeod era on Benlamond Avenue, 1935 to 1950.

About a year after Alexander's death, his sister, Euphemia MacLeod, was sent from her home at 57 Benlamond Avenue to the Ontario Hospital for the Insane, Whitby. She died there almost five years later, on 11 July 1940 shortly before her 81st birthday. She was buried with her parents and her elder brother at St. John's Norway Cemetery, Toronto. Her tombstone is inscribed "Effie MacLeod died July 5, 1940," a different date than the one recorded on her death certificate.

Alexander's widow, Catherine, remained at 57 Benlamond (living in one of three apartments there) until her death on 4 February 1950 at age 83. She was buried in the family plot in St. John's Norway Cemetery. Euphemia MacLeod Blakeman, Catherine's daughter and the executrix of her will, sold the 57 Benlamond Avenue property later that year, thus ending the MacLeod family's 40-year tenure there.



MacLeod family gravestone in St. John's Norway Cemetery, Toronto.
Photo added by Islington to Ancestry.ca (viewed May 1, 2020)

Endnotes for Part 1. Alexander MacLeod and his family, 1855-1950

- ¹ Alexander McLeod [sic] House, 1909, 47 Benlamond Avenue, designation by-law passed by Toronto City Council on 28 May 1990.
- ² Rev. William Darling House, 1873-1876, 57 Benlamond Avenue and 6 Benlamond Road, possibly attributed to his son, Frank Darling, designation by-law passed by City Council on 5 October 1989.
- ³ "Mr. Macleod's Challenge," *Toronto Globe*, 26 February 1924, page 4.
- ⁴ "Railway official passes suddenly: Malcolm H. MacLeod Was C.N.R. Engineer and Former Vice-President," *Toronto Globe*, 10 Feb 1928, page 14.
- ⁵ An online history of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Fenelon Falls states "The building contractor was Mr. Alex McLeod" for the new church on Colborne Street, which "opened for worship on November 10, 1895."
<https://pccweb.ca/standrewsff/about/the-new-church/>
- ⁶ A report, "The Old and the New; St. James' Church Fenelon Falls," *Toronto Globe*, 30 December 1905, page A8, stated "Mr. Alex. McLeod of Toronto, being the architect".
- ⁷ "Called by death," *Toronto Globe*, 10 January 1934, page 9.
- ⁸ East Toronto was incorporated as a village in 1889 and declared a town in 1903; it was annexed to Toronto on 15 December 1908.
- ⁹ George C. Wiggins was a music teacher with a house on Gerrard Street.
- ¹⁰ "East Toronto," *Toronto World*, 4 November 1897, page 7.
- ¹¹ "Railway official passes suddenly" *Toronto Globe*, 10 Feb 1928: 14.
- ¹² "East Toronto," *Toronto World*, 22 October 1901, page 8, column 2.
- ¹³ "East Toronto," *Toronto World*, 5 November 1903, page 8, column 2.
- ¹⁴ *Robertson's Landmarks of Toronto* (Toronto: John Ross Robertson, 1914), 6: 115.
- ¹⁵ "East Toronto's case in courts," *Toronto Star*, 28 June 1904, page 1.
- ¹⁶ "Must submit a by-law: East Toronto electors may vote on annexation," *Toronto Globe*, 8 July 1904, page 5.
- ¹⁷ "Must submit question: East Toronto council and annexation Vote Must be Taken Within Four Weeks from October 3," *Toronto Globe*, 30 September 1904, page 7.
- ¹⁸ "Good year for churches: satisfactory reports at the annual meetings," *Toronto Globe*, 23 January 1908, page 9.
- ¹⁹ "Piling up the building permits," *Toronto Daily Star*, 3 June 1905, page 3.
- ²⁰ Benjamin Morton and James Lamond Smith registered Plan 414 on 1 June 1876, subdividing parts of Lots 3 and 4, First Concession from the Bay, York Township, between Kingston Road and the Grand Trunk Railway tracks, west of the Town Line Road (Main Street). The plan laid out 13 lots and a private road called "Ben Lamond Avenue". Lots 16 and 17 were on the south side of the new road and extended south to a footpath north of Kingston Road. Another private road on the east side of Lot 16 connected Benlamond Avenue with the foot path. Four months later, on 10 October 1976, the developers registered Plan 422 for the same property, "Known as Benlamond," reorganizing and renumbering some of the lots.
- ²¹ The secretary's note book: East Toronto Study Club," *Toronto Globe*, 14 May 1910, page 17.
- ²² *Toronto Star*, 2 February 1918, page 20.
- ²³ World War One Fighter Aces of the British Empire <http://www.billybishop.net/Britishwwi.html> (viewed April 15, 2020)
- ²⁴ "Malcolm P. MacLeod," *Globe and Mail*, 25 February 1960, page. 5. Flt-Lieutenant Malcolm P. MacLeod, DFC, served in the Royal Canadian Air Force 1941-45 and was seriously disabled.
- ²⁵ Herbert Huxley Blakeman (1905-1975?) eventually became the president of the Empire Life Insurance Company, Kingston.
- ²⁶ "Church reorganized under union banner," *Toronto Globe*, 29 May 1925, page 13.
- ²⁷ Grant African Methodist Episcopal Church took over the old Glenmount United Church, 2029 Gerrard Street East, in 1992.
- ²⁸ City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 200, Series 410, File 2574.
- ²⁹ Malcolm H. Macleod borne to last rest," *Toronto Globe*, 13 February 1928, page 14.
- ³⁰ "Called by death," *Toronto Globe*, 10 January 1934, page 9.
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