

## **The Beach and East Toronto Historical Society: Local Story**

### **THE BENLAMOND PANORAMIC PHOTO**

**John Ellis AOCA, August 2020 (Revised February 2021)**

When a “Contact Us” function was added to The Beach and East Toronto Historical Society (TBETHS) website early in 2019, it was decided that, as secretary, I would provide initial responses to comments and queries.

On July 28 2019, Jim Paterson sent a message “Hi, I have a framed diorama photo ... of the Benlamond Estate ... I was wondering if I could donate it to the Society?” I responded that TBETHS would be pleased to take this historic picture. On August 27, Jim showed up on our porch carrying the 19- x 62-inch matted and framed photo.



**The Panoramic Photo donated by Jim Paterson to The Beach and East Toronto Historical Society**

Jim explained that in 2001, while he and his wife were living at 49 Benlamond Avenue, a woman they knew who lived at 49 Glen Oak Drive (which branches south-west off Benlamond Avenue) gave them the picture, saying only that it had been given to her. In 2019 Jim and his wife were moving to Owen Sound, and felt that the photo should remain in the community where it was taken.

As an inveterate historical researcher, I knew I would not be satisfied until I had found out more about the photograph – what places were shown, who created it, and how it was produced. Fortunately, a few serendipitous happenings occurred early in my quest that were of immense assistance.

### **The first bit of serendipity! – Identifying the building on far right of the panorama: 49 Benlamond Avenue**

The first bit of serendipity happened with a “Home of the Week” article in the *Globe and Mail* on September 6, 2019 that featured Apartment 2, 49 Benlamond Avenue. The piece included several interior and exterior views of the 1,200 square-foot, garden-facing, second-floor unit (asking price \$899,000). A Eureka moment came when I realized that this apartment house was the same building that was shown on the far right side of the panoramic photo.

### Rear of 49 Benlamond Avenue



*Globe and Mail*, 6 September 2019



Panoramic Photo, c.1918

The article explained that the apartment house “was built in two phases by Toronto builder Alexander McLeod, first a three-apartment building that was later twinned. There are two main staircases, one for the rear units and one for the front”.<sup>1</sup> Earlier research conducted for TBETHS documented that MacLeod (as he spelled his surname) received two building permits for his apartment house on Benlamond Avenue, the first in 1911 and the second in August 1918 for a three-storey brick and concrete addition costing \$4,500. It is thought that new units were added to the back of the building.

### **And now, the second bit of serendipity! – Identifying the creator of the panoramic photograph: William James Johnston of the Panoramic Camera Co.**

To learn more about the panoramic photo, I carefully removed it from the frame and discovered that the only information on it was printed on the front bottom margin of the image:

Photo R294  
Panoramic Camera Co.  
239 Victoria St. Toronto

Upon sharing this information with TBETHS Board of Directors, Glenn Chadwick, a director, shared an article he had from the May-June 2010 issue of *Photographic Canadiana* magazine, which mentioned “In 1907 the *Panoramic Camera Company of Canada* was established at 18 Victoria Street to take photographs with Wm. J. Johnston being designated as manager.”<sup>2</sup>

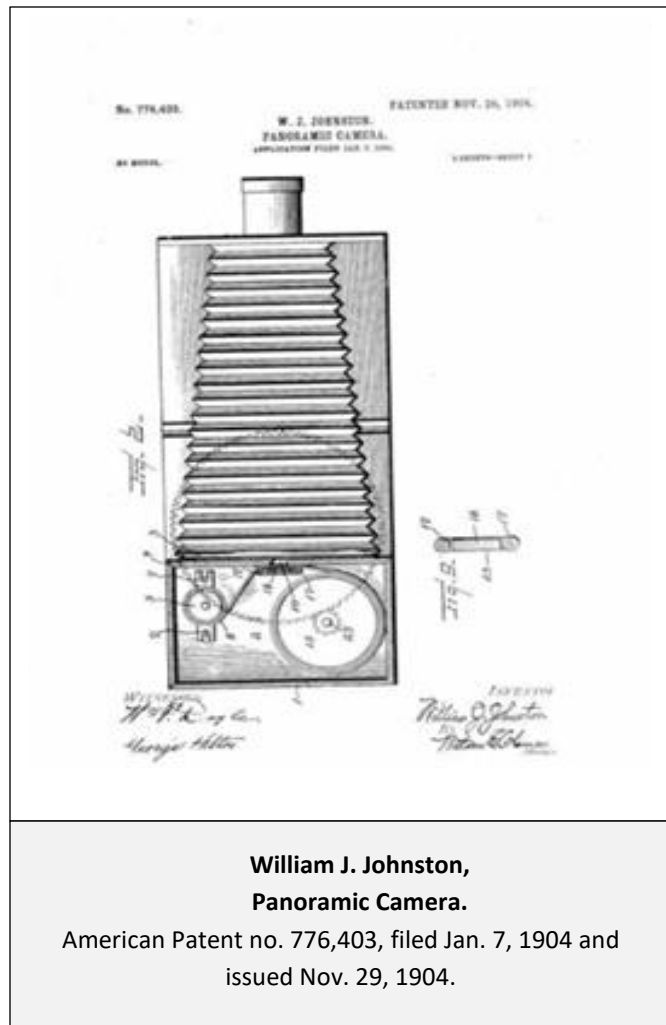
The piece documented that William James Johnston was born in 1856 in Portsmouth, Ontario (near Kingston) and moved to the United States as a young man. By 1880, he was a photographer in Sweetwater, Wyoming, where he lived until the early 1900s, returning briefly to Ontario in 1888 to be married to Margaret Fraser (1851-1933).

<sup>1</sup> Shane Dingman, “Home of the week: a 106-year-old Toronto condo oddity,” *Globe and Mail*, 6 September 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Lansdale, “The inventors of the Cirkut camera and its parts,” *Photographic Canadiana*, May-June 2010, p. 18.

In 1904, Johnston took out the first patents for his invention of a panoramic camera, known as the Cirkut Camera. Patents eventually were registered in 21 countries, according to Johnston's obituary.<sup>3</sup>

A history of panoramic photography noted that the Cirkut Camera "became a popular format for commercial photographers and was used to make large group portraits and city scenes. It used large film that ranged from 5" to 16" wide and could be as long as 20 feet! Both the camera and the film rotated and the view could be as wide as 360°.<sup>4</sup> Everything within sight of the revolving machine was included in the photograph. The camera was available for sale in Toronto by February 1905 when the *Toronto Daily Star* announced that Simpson Bros., Yonge Street, "has something new in a camera invented by W. J. Johnston, which takes panoramic views. This is the only one in the world, and overcomes the great difficulty of taking a picture of a wide area."<sup>5</sup> (This claim was quickly disputed by John R. Cannon of Elora whom the *Star* quickly acknowledged "invented a similar camera to the one described in 1887, and had it patented in Great Britain, the United States and Canada").



Johnston became one of the principals in the Rochester Camera Co. established in 1904 in Rochester, New York to manufacture his invention. That same year, the Rochester Company was sold for \$5,000 to the Century Camera Company, then owned by Eastman Kodak Company, which continued to manufacture the Cirkut into the 1940s. Johnston sold his rights, except for Canadian patent, and returned to Canada.

### Johnston and the Panoramic Camera Company in Toronto

Johnston established the Panoramic Camera Co. in Toronto. It soon was creating panoramic photographs of local groups and places – one of its earliest works were three views of Scarborough Beach Park produced in 1907.

<sup>3</sup> "W. J. JOHNSTON STRICKEN AT 84: Was Noted as Inventor of Panoramic Camera." *Globe and Mail*, 29 Oct 1941

<sup>4</sup> University of Washington University Libraries. *History of Panoramic Photography*.

<https://content.lib.washington.edu/panoramweb/history.html>

<sup>5</sup> "Latest in photography," *Toronto Daily Star*, 28 Feb 1905: 9.

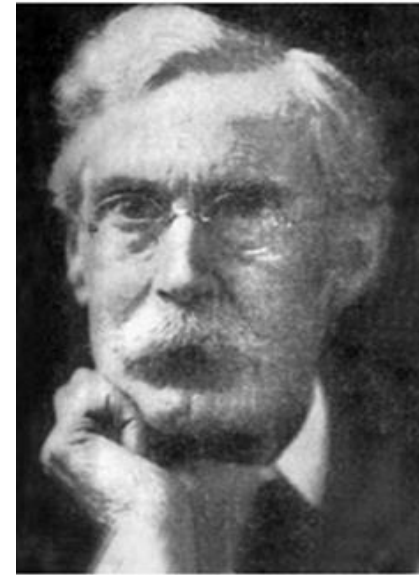


**Scarboro Beach Park, Lake Ontario between Leuty Avenue and Maclean Avenue, 1907**  
Panoramic Camera Co. / Library and Archives Canada / RG105

The 1911 census recorded that Johnston's business was at 239 Victoria Street, and that he and his wife lived in rented rooms at 51 Lee Avenue. Business boomed during the First World War, when the Panoramic Camera Co. took hundreds of group photographs of units of the Canadian Expeditionary Force and the Royal Flying Corps before going overseas.

Johnston remained at 51 Lee Avenue until about 1920, when he went to California to look after mining interests. A nephew, Fred Stanley Rickard<sup>6</sup>, took over management of the Photographic Camera Co. Local views continued to be produced, such as a picnic at Kew Gardens, the Kew Beach Bowling Club, Woodbine race track and the Toronto Hunt Club.

Johnston was back in Canada by the late 1920s and retired in 1930. He continued to live at various places at the Beach and died at 65 Lee Avenue on 18 October 1941. The *Globe and Mail* published an obituary 12 days later.<sup>7</sup> He is buried with his wife in an unmarked grave in St. John's Norway Cemetery.



**William James Johnston**

*Photographs created by the Panoramic Camera Co. are housed at Toronto Public Library, City of Toronto Archives, with the largest collections at Archives of Ontario and Library and Archives Canada.*



**Cirkut Camera No. 10**

Graflex Catalogue 1918

Price (Including Leather Carrying Case): \$310.00

<sup>6</sup> Fred Stanley Rickard was born in London, Ontario on 20 January 1890, and was a son of Nicholas Rickard and Margaret Johnston, William Johnston's younger sister.

<sup>7</sup> "W. J. JOHNSTON STRICKEN AT 84: Was Noted as Inventor of Panoramic Camera." *Globe and Mail*, 29 Oct 1941.

## Discovering more about the Benlamond panoramic photograph with site visits

Now it was time for me to visit Benlamond Avenue, and see what more I could discover about the places that were pictured in the panoramic photo.

### Building on the right of the panoramic photo: 49 Benlamond Avenue

First, at 49 Benlamond Avenue I noticed that the pillared arch shown in the panoramic image (but not in the *Globe and Mail* article) was still intact at the back of the property and that the same arch was also at the entrance to the walkway at the front. (Barbara Myrvold's research on Alexander MacLeod revealed that identically matching arches were at MacLeod's first house in East Toronto at 9 Swanwick Avenue.)

#### Rear of 49 Benlamond Avenue – the Pillared Arches



2020 Photo: John Ellis



c.1918 Photo: Wm. J. Johnston

### Building on the far left of the panoramic photo: 57 Benlamond Drive

Second, I quickly identified that the building on the far left of the panorama was 57 Benlamond Avenue.

2019



Photo: Bob Krawczyk TOBuilt

c. 1918



Photo: Wm. J. Johnston

Through Toronto's Heritage Register and Bylaw Register, I learned that 57 Benlamond Avenue and its neighbour to the west at 6 Benlamond Drive were built as a single dwelling between 1873 and 1876 by William Stewart Darling (1818-1886), a Church of England clergyman then the rector of Toronto's Church of the Holy Trinity. The design of the large 2½ storey house is attributed to Darling's son, illustrious architect Frank Darling. The property at 57 Benlamond Avenue and 6 Benlamond Drive was designated for its architectural and historical value or interest by Toronto City Council on 5 October 1989, [By-law Number 989-0633](#), which called it "one of the earliest surviving houses in East Toronto".

**Rev. Wm. Stewart Darling House, West Wing,  
57 Benlamond Avenue, then 59 Benlamond Avenue, and now 6 Benlamond Drive.**

In the c.1918 Panoramic Photograph this building is barely visible behind the East Wing.  
Standing on a large property on the south side of Benlamond Avenue, it was purchased by Alexander MacLeod in 1907. MacLeod soon divided the Darling house into two dwellings. He retained 57 Benlamond Avenue on the east side for himself, and he and his family were living there by 1910. MacLeod died at the house in 1934 and wife Catherine remained there until her death in 1950.



"This grand frame was built for William Stewart Darling, rector of Toronto's Church of the Holy Trinity. It was prominently situated to offer spectacular views and to overlook a scenic ravine known as "Ben Lamond Park", named for Benjamin Morton and James Lamond Smith, previous owners of the property. Along with nearby "Glen Stewart", also constructed at this time for Darling, the house was most likely designed by his son, illustrious architect Frank Darling. The house was soon purchased by merchant William Monteith, then by William Davies, whose company would contribute to the formation of Canada Packers; and later by Alexander MacLeod, a builder who subdivided the dwelling in 1910. Featuring Italianate and Second Empire styles, the Darling house is one of the oldest surviving residences of East Toronto."

Designated under the Ontario Heritage Act, 1989  
HERITAGE TORONTO 2005

### Building on the middle right of the panorama: 1 Benlamond Drive

With more difficulty, I determined that the dwelling at 1 Benlamond Drive was the house that was visible second from the right in the panoramic picture, but the garage was no longer there.

#### 1 Benlamond Drive



East Façade, 2020

Photo: John Ellis



East Façade, c.1918

Photo: Wm. J. Johnston

Earlier research for TBETHS documented that 1 Benlamond Drive was originally 61 Benlamond Avenue. Robert Shaw was granted Toronto building permit 16639 on 29 June 1909 for a 2½-storey brick dwelling on Benlamond Avenue costing \$6,000 and designed by Toronto architect William G. Burns. On 10 October 1911, Shaw received Toronto building permit 30869 for a one-storey roughcast garage costing \$280 on Benlamond Avenue. He and/or his family lived at 61 Benlamond Avenue from 1911 until 1916.

But the house and the property were owned by Mr. Shaw's employer, Emma J. Davis, who acquired most of Lot 17 and the adjacent Benjamin Morton Estate in 1909. Shaw was Mrs. Davis's garage keeper. In comparing the 2020 photo with the c. 1918 photo, the house was later enlarged on the northern façade and the garage was demolished. 61 Benlamond Avenue became 1 Benlamond Drive in 1933, when that drive was created. It retained that address when Glen Oak Drive was created in 1939.

### Fence and garden in the middle left of the panorama: Now 55 Benlamond Avenue

But where in the panoramic photo were the fence and the garden shown in the middle left? A site visit revealed that there had been substantial development since 1918. An article in *Beach Metro News* recounted events in 1995 providing part of the answer:

"The Battle of Benlamond raged on as angry Beachers fought to preserve what they claimed was a uniquely beautiful part of the city. They opposed plans to construct ten semi-detached houses on land to the rear of and between 47 and 57 Benlamond Avenue. The builder's original plan had been culled back from 64 condo units to comply with ravine bylaws, and 47 and 57 Benlamond were designated as historic sites. The new plans were approved by the Committee of Adjustment, prompting residents to launch an appeal at the OMB, but this was dropped when the city withdrew its support. The fate of the development would now go to arbitration."

[Beach Metro News 2012/04/05](#)

The developer won! In-fill housing was built along both sides of the Benlamond side-street and between the houses at 47 and 57 Benlamond Avenue. The new house that became 55A Benlamond Avenue was built where the fence and the garden appeared in the panoramic photograph.

## Where was the panoramic picture taken?

Now that all four places on the panoramic photo had been identified, I wanted to understand how the photograph was created. Some of our directors expressed confusion about what had happened to the garden in the middle of the panoramic photo.

**(In reviewing the text on this page, please refer to illustrations on the next page)**

During my visit to the site I sought to replicate the panoramic photo by taking a series of still photos:

- Starting with the same view of the rear of no. 49,
- Moving the camera left to the next view,
- Moving the camera left again to the next view, and
- Finally, moving to the view of the of the east wing of the William Stewart Darling House.

As you can see, my sequential photos when laid out side-to-side almost exactly duplicate the panoramic photo. It becomes clear that the in-fill housing covers the area where the Darling garden was located. Also clear is that the rotation of the panoramic camera distorted the horizontal middle of the scene, as is evident from my sequence photos (no. 55A seems to bend horizontally). The puzzlement about why the former garden seems to bend is thus explained. Eureka!

An aerial map (Google Satellite) helps us understand the location of the four elements in the photo in relation to each other:

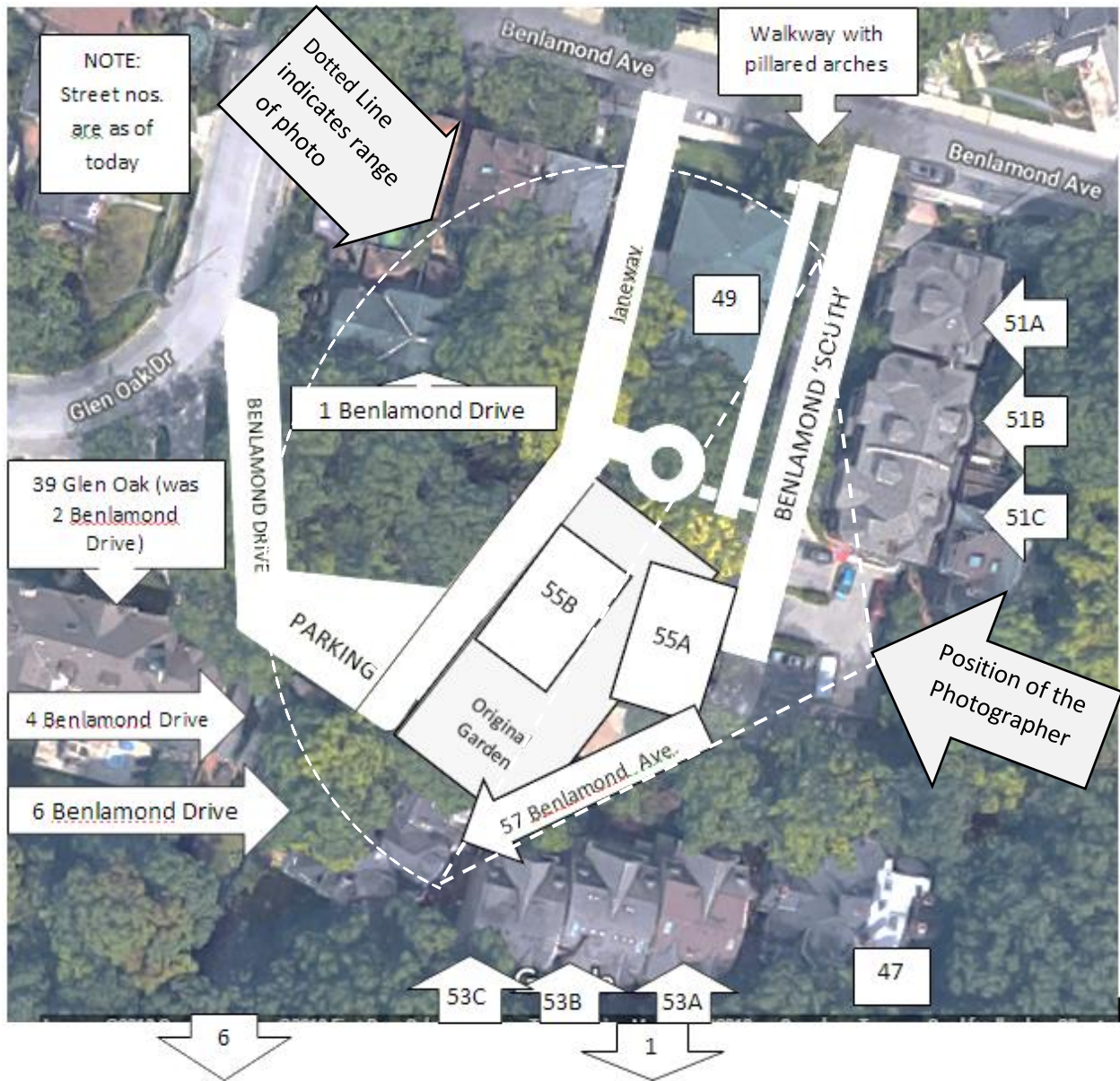
- The Alexander MacLeod Apartment building at 49 Benlamond Avenue,
- The Emma Davis house at 1 Benlamond Drive,
- The former Garden between 57 and 49 Benlamond Avenue, and
- The Rev. Wm. Stewart Darling House at 57 Benlamond Avenue and 6 Benlamond Drive.

Also included to aid understanding is:

- The location of Benlamond Drive (otherwise invisible in the trees in this map);
- The location of the former garden;
- A laneway from Benlamond Drive, past no. 49 to Benlamond Avenue in order to service no. 49 and no. 1 Benlamond Drive;
- A circular driveway off this lane formerly was behind no. 49. Residents there confirmed this and it is shown on the map.

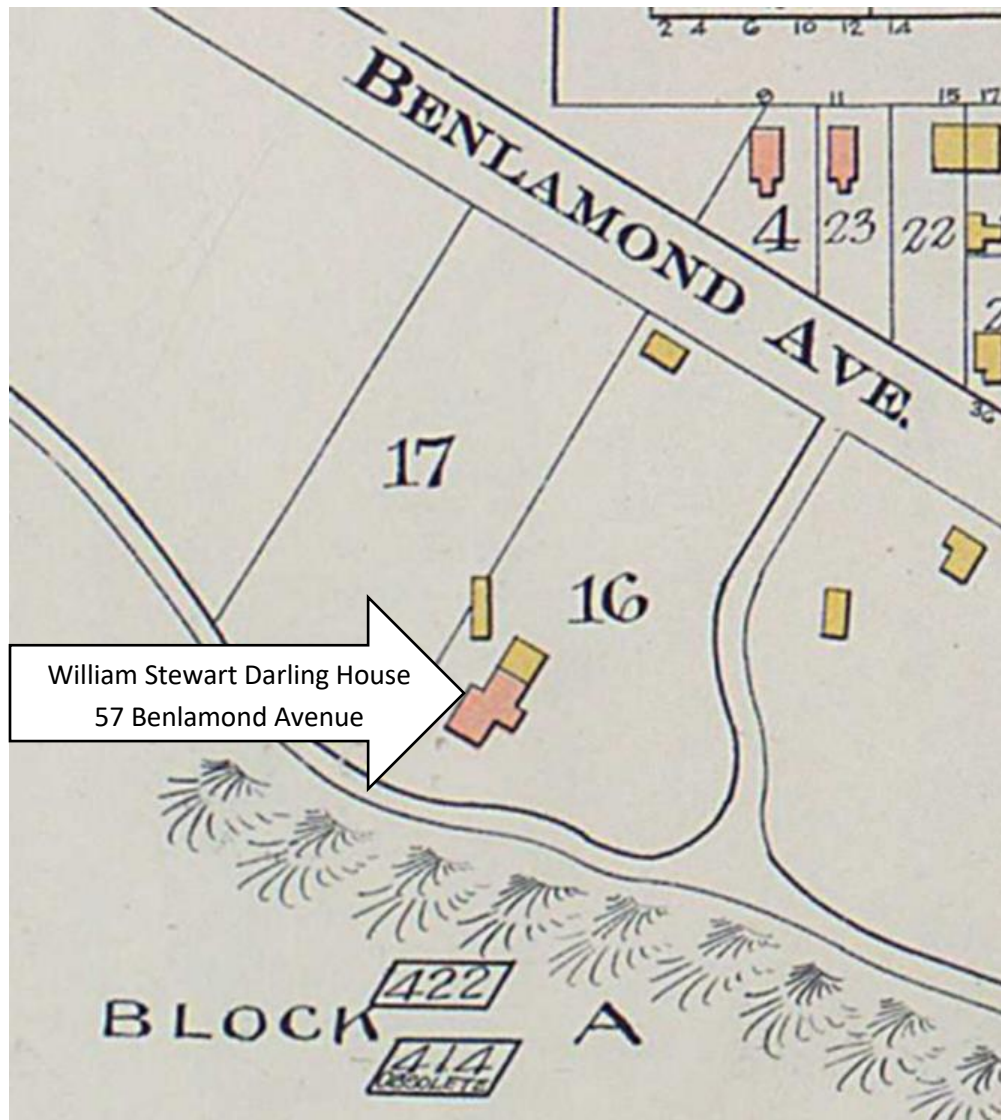
Finally, an important aid to understanding is indication in white dotted lines on the map to illustrate:

- The location of the panoramic photographer and
- The area covered by the panoramic camera when the photo was taken.



## Early Views of the Panoramic Photograph Area

1910



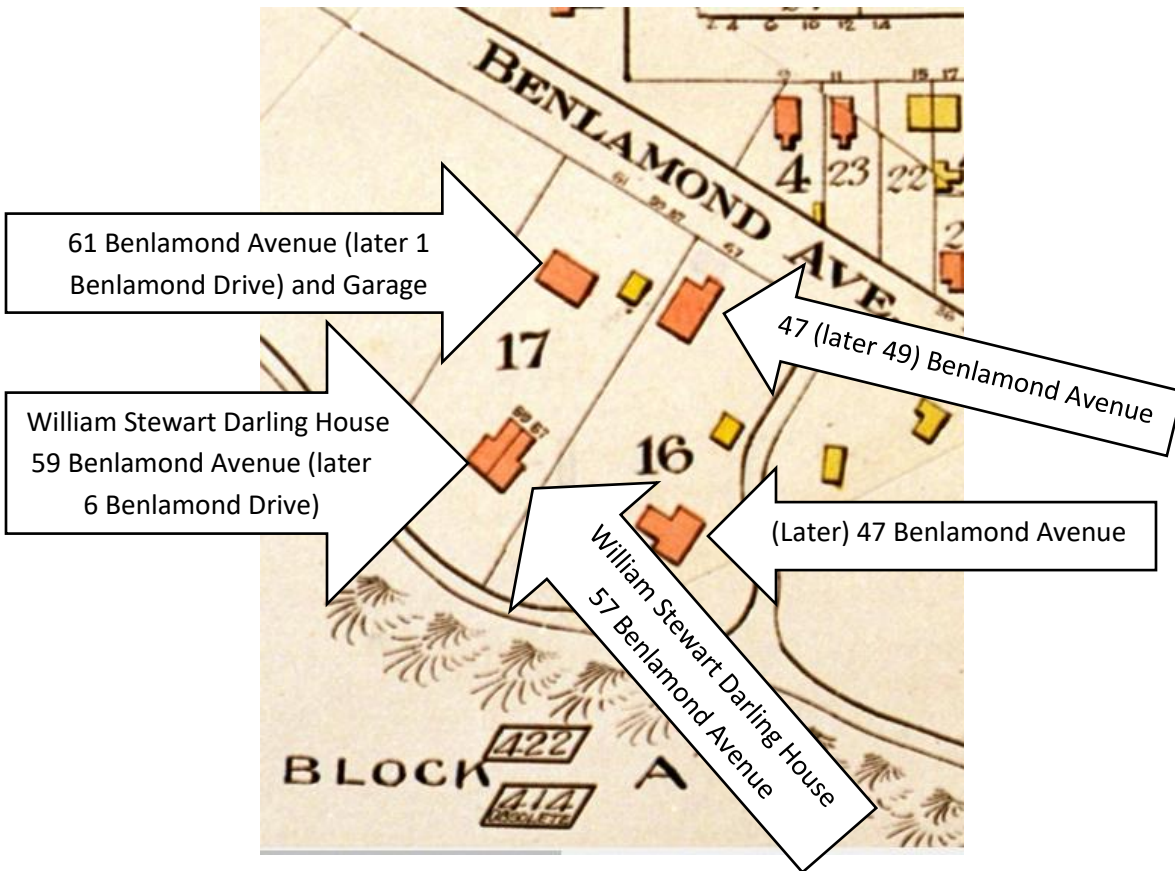
Detail, Plate 111, *Goad's Atlas of Toronto*, 1910

[https://static.torontopubliclibrary.ca/da/pdfs/m912\\_7135\\_g57\\_1910.pdf](https://static.torontopubliclibrary.ca/da/pdfs/m912_7135_g57_1910.pdf)

**Note:** Buildings coloured red on Goad's atlases and plans were constructed of brick; those coloured yellow were wood (frame); and those coloured grey were stone or cement.

In 1907-1909, Alexander Macleod acquired the properties in Lots 16 and 17 on the south side of Benlamond Avenue (shown above in the 1910 map). The large brick-and-frame building later known as the William Stewart Darling House, built in 1873-'76, is shown at the top of the ravine (this map mistakenly placed it on Lot 16 instead of Lot 17). Alexander MacLeod's properties also contained two other wood structures. The lane on the east side of Lot 16 was laid out in 1876 as a private road leading from Benlamond Avenue to a footpath along the edge of the ravine.

1913



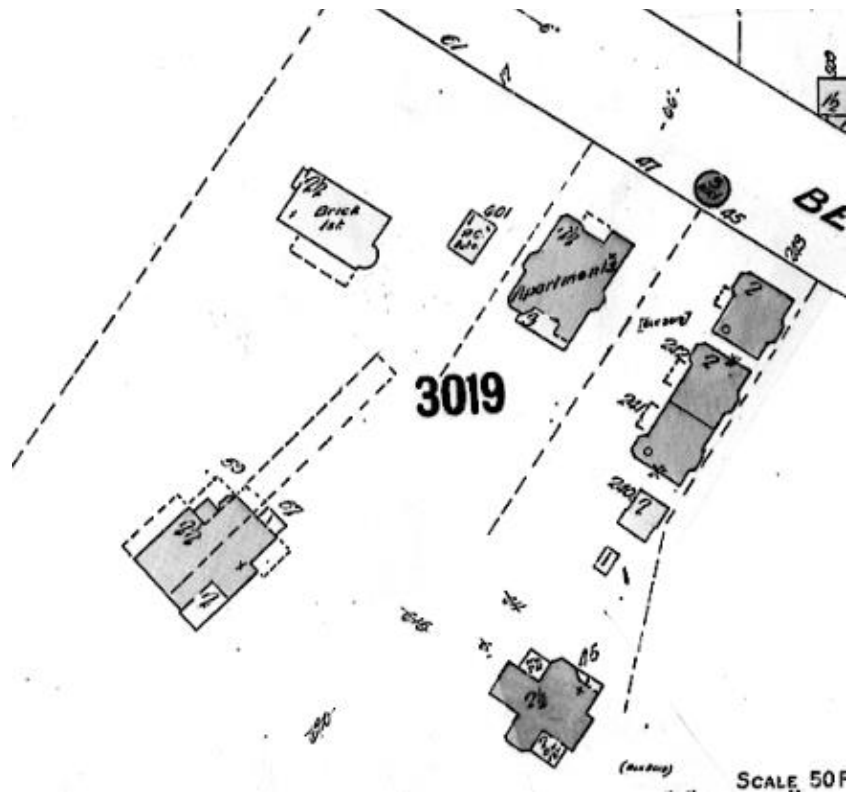
[Detail, Plate 111, Goad's Atlas of Toronto, 1913](#)

The 1913 map shows that the William Stewart Darling House had been divided into two dwellings - the brick building labelled 57 and 59 and shown in its correct location on Lot 17. (However, this diagram doesn't resemble the house in 1918. This diagram is simply *Goads* effort to indicate a divided building.) These addresses are now 57 Benlamond Avenue and 6 Benlamond Drive. At this time, Alexander MacLeod owned and resided at no. 57 Benlamond Avenue, the east part of the divided house, and Emma Davis owned and rented no. 59 Benlamond Avenue, the west part. The frame section of the old house and the two frame structures that were shown on the 1910 map have disappeared and probably were demolished.

The map also shows that several new buildings had been added to the two lots since 1910. The brick residence on Lot 17, No. 61 Benlamond Avenue on this map, became No. 1 Benlamond Drive in 1933. Robert A. Shaw received a building permit for it in 1909 and lived there until about 1916, but the house and the property were owned by Emma Davis, who acquired part of Lot 17 and the adjacent Benjamin Morton Estate to the west in 1909. Shaw looked after Mrs. Davis's automobiles, which were kept in the frame building on Lot 17. This garage has since been demolished.

Alexander MacLeod had added the two new brick buildings and the frame structure on Lot 16, having received permits for them in 1909 and 1911. No 47 on this map is now 49 Benlamond Avenue (an apartment house) and the unnumbered building near the ravine is now 47 Benlamond Avenue (a residence divided into flats).

1916



[Detail, Goad's Atlas of Toronto, vol. IX, Plate 904 Late East Toronto Revised to March 1916](#)

45 Benlamond Avenue on the map (bottom right) is now no. 47 and the apartment building labelled no. 47 on the map is now no. 49 Benlamond Avenue.

The dotted lines on the map likely indicate laneways or driveways. The most easterly one on the right is the old footpath that connected Benlamond Avenue with another footpath along the top of the ravine. The one between the new buildings at no. 45 and the apartments at no. 47 still exists but it has been extended to provide access to the properties at the rear of the lot including those marked 45 (now no. 47 Benlamond Avenue) and no. 57 (the east half of the double house) on the map.

The dotted line on the left side of the map is now part of Glen Oak Drive. No. 61, the 2½ storey house with a brick first floor, is now no. 1 Benlamond Drive, and the one-storey rough cast building marked "auto" was its garage, which was eventually demolished. No. 59, the west half of the Rev. William Stewart Darling double house, is now no. 6 Benlamond Drive.

## And where is the panoramic photograph being kept?

In November 2019, TBETHS directors donated the framed photo to the Toronto Public Library, with expectation that TBETHS will receive a digital copy for our website.

Peggy Perdue, Senior Services Specialist, Special Collections Department, Toronto Public Library, reported on October 20, 2020, that when the photo was removed from the frame to begin conservation, the library conservation staff identified a kind of hazardous mold on it that cannot be treated in-house, so it will take longer and require special funding. However, they will be sure to get the digital copy to us as soon as possible.



Through my site visits, I learned that, in addition to the copy Jim Paterson gave us from his home at 49 Benlamond Avenue (originally at 39 Glen Oak Drive) other copies of the panoramic photograph are in homes on Benlamond Avenue. Perhaps Alexander MacLeod had commissioned the picture around the time that he enlarged his apartment building, and distributed them to neighbours and occupants in the area.

## For more information

Barbara Myrvold, [Alexander MacLeod and Alexander MacLeod's developments on Benlamond Avenue, Lots 16 and 17, Plan 422, and vicinity](#)

Watch for three related stories that John Ellis is preparing for the TBETHS website:

- William Stewart Darling (1818-1886) – Homes, haunts, and churches.
- William Stewart Darling and Family (1818-1886) – Biography and genealogy.
- Development of Benlamond Subdivision and Estates.