



# THE OTLBC CLUBHOUSE: A SHORT HERITAGE PERSPECTIVE

...in words and pictures by Ross Eaman



1884

Elgin Street  
(1881-1887)



1888

Cartier Street  
(1888-1901)



1916

Third Ave  
(1907-1922)



View of the OTLBC clubhouse from a southwest vantage point on the club's 4.9 acre property at 176 Cameron Avenue

Earlier locations of the club, which was founded in 1881 as the Ottawa Lawn Tennis Club, making it the second oldest tennis club in Canada.

It became the Ottawa Tennis and Lawn Bowling Association in 1902 when it moved to Patterson Avenue for five years (no photo available). The Elgin Street location is now the site of Knox Presbyterian Church.

Seated in the 1884 photo above is Lady Agnes MacDonald, wife of the prime minister



Lawn Tennis Club, Ottawa, Can.

Lawn tennis on Third Avenue on the eve of the First World War.

The club's lawn bowling membership included George A. Crain and his wife, Mary Parlow Crain. In 1906 they had moved from Gilmour Street to one of the first houses on Clemow, number 285 designed by the prominent Ottawa architect Colbourne Powell Meredith.

In 1917 George and Mary Crain lived in fear as their son, George E. "Eddie" Crain, went off to Europe to serve his country. After graduating from Royal Military College, he joined the British Army as a second lieutenant. He fought at Ypres and served with the famous Guards Division in Cologne during the occupation. In 1919 he returned to Canada and went to McGill University where he graduated as a civil engineer.



Residence of G. A. Crain, Clemon Avenue, Ottawa. In this house the square design has been adapted to being built back to show the construction of a Riverside Ltd. The substance of construction was the Roof and Windows Treatment with Stone Open to Produce an interesting Effect. G. P. Meredith, Architect.

285 Clemow Avenue

After the war, tennis flourished in the Ottawa area. By the early 1920s, there were 27 clubs affiliated with the Ottawa District Lawn Tennis Association with a combined membership of some 2,000 players, over 500 of whom belonged to the OTLBA which had another 100 on a waiting list.

In the early 1920s, George A. Crain became president of the OTLBA and spearheaded a plan to move the club from Third Avenue to a much larger facility on Cameron Street (later Avenue) in what was then simply Ottawa South. The move was a part of the post-war recovery and regeneration.



George A. Crain  
(1872-1946)

George A. Crain was a prominent building contractor in Ottawa at the time. His father, Robert Crain, had built Lisgar Collegiate in the early 1870s.

On March 10, 1922, the Ottawa Citizen reported on the relocation plans – “which are now about complete” – to be submitted to the membership for its approval. It said that “the courts will face Cameron” and the clubhouse “will be built facing the river, with wide verandahs all around it . . . in order that the tennis may be watched.” The location of the clubhouse was subsequently changed. But the concept of the wide verandah and balcony was retained and beautifully incorporated into the final design.

Through Crain’s influence, that design was drawn up by John Albert Ewart, the doyen of Ottawa architects at the time.

J. A. Ewart was the son of former Dominion architect David Ewart, who used the Tudor Gothic style for the Dominion Archives Building (1904-06), the Victoria Memorial Museum (1905-08), and the Royal Mint (1905-08).

After apprenticing in the office of Arnoldi & Calderon, Ewart studied political science at the University of Toronto. Upon graduation in 1895, Arnoldi invited him back to his firm as a full partner.



John Albert Ewart (1872-1964)  
Ottawa Citizen, Saturday, 28 October 1922, p. 10



**A short list of J. A. Ewart’s works in Ottawa includes:**

- 1910 - St. Paul’s Presbyterian Church
- 1912 - Ottawa Motor Boat Club
- 1913 - Booth Building
- 1913 - American Bank Note Company
- 1914 - Calvin Presbyterian Church (Sunnyside & Fairbair)
- 1916-17 - Transportation Building
- 1917 - A. J. Freeman Department Store
- 1919-20 - Hunter Building
- 1919-20 - Jackson Building (where he had his office)
- 1922-23 - Ottawa Civic Hospital (with Stevens & Lee)
- 1922-23 - Glebe Collegiate Institute
- 1924-27 - Metropolitan Life Building
- 1926-27 - Ottawa Electric Building
- 1928 - Victoria Building
- 1929 - High School of Commerce
- 1929 - British American Bank Note Company
- 1931 - Southminster United Church
- 1932 - Knox Presbyterian Church (OTLBC’s first location)
- 1940 - El Rancho Restaurant (Bate Island, Champlain Bridge)
- 1949-50 - Ottawa South Public Library (with A. J. Hazelwood)

Ewart also designed residential properties on Clemow, Madawaska, Island Park Drive, and in Rockcliffe Park, including a coach house office at “Earnscliffe” for the British High Commissioner.

**What style of architecture did Ewart choose for the OTLBC clubhouse?**

In 1916-17, he designed the Transportation Building, an early Ottawa skyscraper, using an “elaborate Beaux-Arts style that featured a façade clad entirely in exquisitely crafted terra cotta tile.” Later in life, he donated a copy of Jacques Gréber’s paean to that style – Architecture in the United States(1920) – to the Ottawa Public Library.

We also know that Ewart “possessed a scholarly knowledge of ecclesiastical architecture which he used . . . in his refined Gothic Revival design for Southminster United Church in 1931.” [Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada 1800-1950].

But neither of these styles was used in the case of the OTLBC clubhouse.

Instead Ewart used the Revived Tudor style – and for this there was a great precedent. In Forest Hills in New York City, where the West Side Tennis Club had relocated to a 10-acre site in 1912, the Tudor style (dominant in Forest Hills at time) was chosen for its signature clubhouse, completed in 1914.



A photo of the Tudor-style clubhouse of the West Side Tennis Club taken between 1910-1915.



OTLBC clubhouse at 176 Cameron



Ewart's "mansion" at 114 Cameron

It was here that the U.S. Open Tennis Championships was held from 1915 to 1920 and from 1924 to 1977.

Ewart used the Tudor style in his own house down the street – 114 Cameron, where he moved in 1909. His father had earlier built his house on Cameron and J. A. Ewart later designed two other Tudor-style houses on the street.

The Tudor style featured steeply pitched roofs with gables and decorative half-timbering with the spaces between filled with stucco or masonry.

Contrary to some accounts, Crain did not use his own firm to build the clubhouse. As a full-page story in the Journal about the club's official opening confirms, the general contractor for the project was Ferguson & Lambert with numerous Ottawa trades participating in the work.

On June 22, 1922, the Journal reported that “the club will be an all the year around meeting place.” That was not financially feasible at the time. But as described by the Journal, what was built was much more than your average clubhouse: the ground floor had “a buffet, a secretary’s office, a lounge-rotunda, locker rooms and shower facilities, while the second floor had a large main lounge, two card rooms, a dining room, and a kitchen.”

The clubhouse was specifically designed for social events: weekly dances with live bands, bridge parties, fashion shows, jamborees, and other social activities for its Jazz Age members. And until the Depression, it was indeed the hub of a vibrant social life in Ottawa South. Symbolic of this spirit was the organization of an end-of-season supper dance in 1929 at the Chateau Laurier for all tennis players in the city!

In 1925 – two years after the move to Cameron – the American architect Aymar Enbury II wrote in the Architectural Forum:

*The design of the successful country club, both exterior and interior, should express ease, comfort and well-ordered gaiety. A club is primarily a social place and besides amenities such as locker rooms and a reception area, every club requires a main lounge where members can relax during the day and entertain at night. On no account should piers or columns obstruct the floor space of either a lounge or a dining room, which at times may be used for dancing. Another key feature is the veranda. Porches terraces or verandas should be placed as to give them full views of the tennis courts.*

While there is no evidence that Enbury visited the OTLBC clubhouse, this description reads as if he has just ascended to the club’s main lounge, imagined a twirl around its wide-open dance floor with its magnificent raised ceiling, and then proceeded onto the upper verandah for a view across a landscaped terrace to the tennis courts and lawn bowling greens beyond.



OTLBC members posing for a club “selfie” in the 1920s.