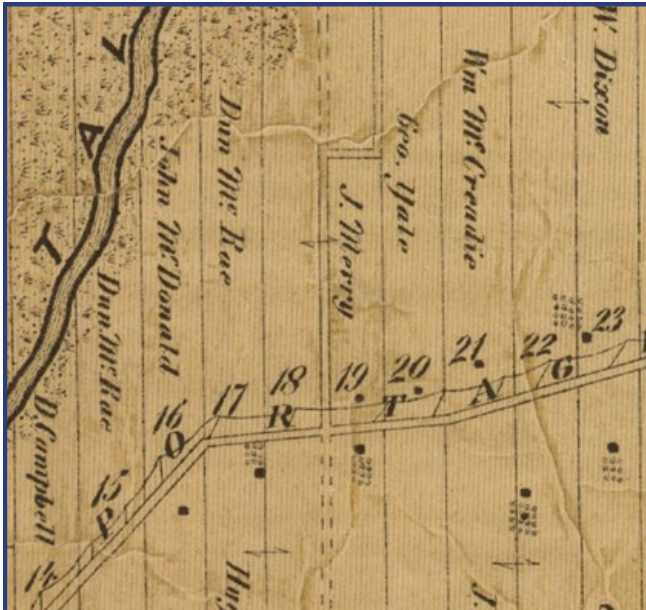


# Lady Margaret Mackenzie

of Kirkfield, Ontario

Named after her paternal grandmother, Lady Margaret Mackenzie was born on June 30, 1850 to John Merry of Waterford, Ireland, and Honora Sullivan. The Merry family settled and farmed Lot 19, just east of Kirkfield on the Portage Road. Margaret was the eldest of 12 children and grew up picking turnips and potatoes on her family's farm. When she was older, Margaret worked at Biddy Young's Hotel as an upstairs maid (the proprietor was Julia Young, known as 'Biddy,' an Irish word for 'unusual woman') in Portage Station.



The Merry Farm  
James A. Patterson, County of  
Victoria Map, 1877



Lady Margaret Mackenzie (nee Merry)  
at the time of her husband's  
knighthood, c. 1911  
Fleming, R.B., The Railway King of  
Canada, 1991

Margaret met her husband William Mackenzie during their school days in Bolsover, they also grew up on the Portage Road mere lots from each other, between Portage Station and Bolsover.

The couple was married on July 8, 1872 in the vestry of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary Roman Catholic Church (St. Mary's) in Lindsay by Father M. Stafford.

According to Rae Fleming's, *The Railway King of Canada*, "no one from either family attended the wedding as Margaret was Roman Catholic and William was Protestant."

With land purchased in 1886 from Robert Armstrong for \$3,700.00 (Victoria Warder, February 12 1886) the Mackenzie family completed their first family home in 1888. At the cost of \$18, 000.00, Margaret oversaw the building and design of all aspects, including the parlour, reception, dining rooms, finely finished oak staircase, 15 bedrooms and 5-meter-wide entrance hall. Margaret and William raised 9 children here.



Margaret and William Mackenzie with their children: Grace (baby), R.J. and Gertrude (standing at back), Mabel (far left), Joe (on stool), Ethel (standing between her parents), Katharine (on William's knee), Bertha (far right) and Alex (in front), c. 1889; Fleming, R.B., *The Railway King of Canada*, 1991



Margaret loved Kirkfield and saw great opportunity to build a beautiful community center here. She oversaw the building of a "community hall, school, developed a park and Catholic burial ground next to the Protestant cemetery and began to line the streets with hard maples."

Lady Mackenzie and her gardeners planted over 600 maples and elms along Kirkfield streets. Margaret oversaw the early beautification of the Village of Kirkfield, and was active in its maintenance.

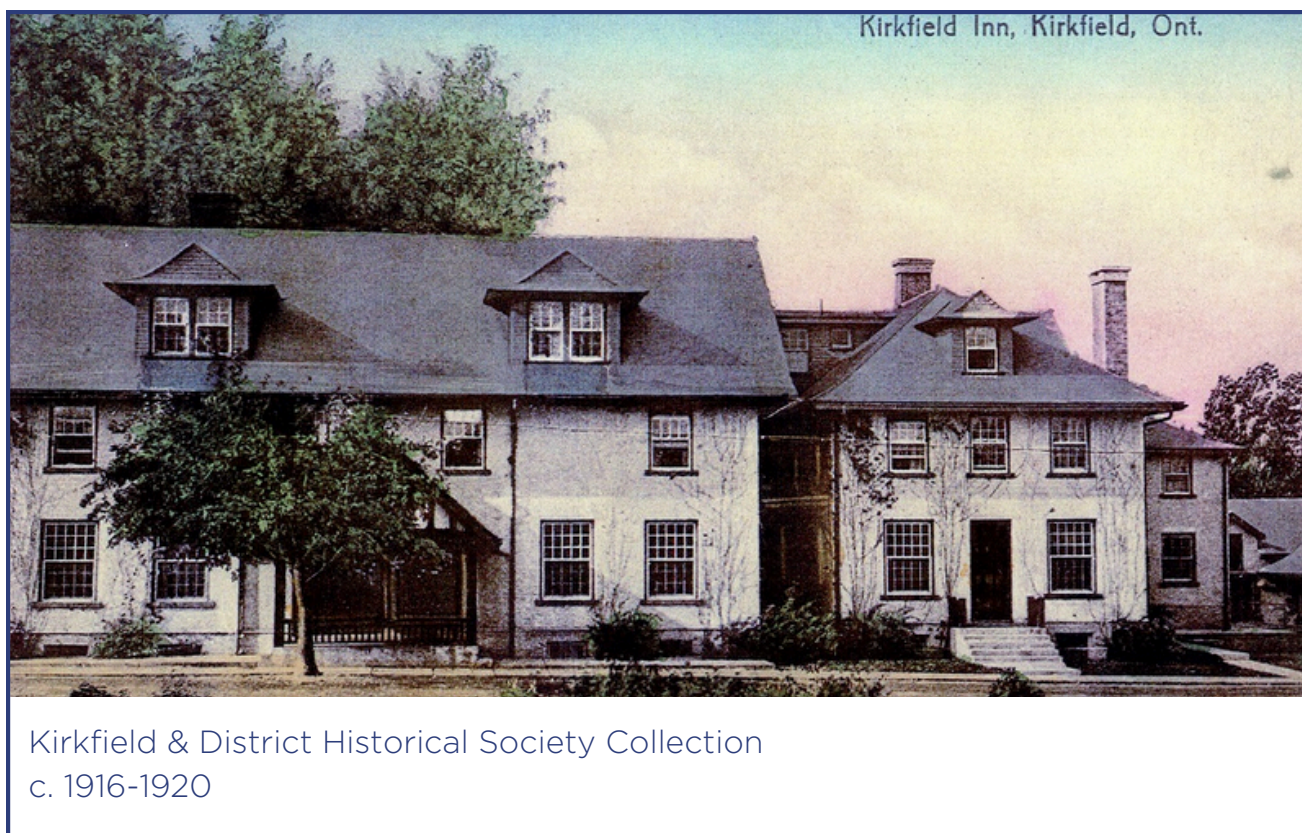
In 1889 the family acquired a second home located in Toronto called 'Benvenuto.' During this time the family name changed from Mckenzie/ McKenzie to "the more genteel, more Scottish and Protestant, 'Mackenzie.'"

At the beginning of the 20th century the Mackenzie family moved to Duncan, British Columbia to further William's vision of a transcontinental railway, from Cape Breton Island to Vancouver Island. During this time Margaret bought and managed a downtown log tavern, while also owning a saloon in Donald, Ontario. Margaret helped with her husband's accounts and maintained his social events calendar, not to mention planned and hosted some of the most elaborate parties

In 1905, the train line reached Cambridge, Ontario and in 1908 Margaret purchased the Royal Oak Hotel. The hotel was completely remodeled and renamed the 'Gamebridge Inn.'

William Mackenzie and his business partner Donald Mann were knighted for their efforts in the railway industry in 1911 and Margaret Mackenzie became Lady Mackenzie.

In 1912, Lady Mackenzie funded the building of the Kirkfield Inn. Sadly this once very popular hotel succumbed to fire in 1925.



At the time of her death, Lady Mackenzie was a member of the Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire, a director of the Toronto Humane Society, vice-president of the Canadian Immigration Guild and a member of the executive committee of the Ontario branch of the Dominion Defence League. According to her obituary, 'since the outbreak of war she had been active in relief work.'

Lady Mackenzie passed in Toronto on November 29, 1917 and is buried in Kirkfield next to her husband, and three of her children.

## Resources

Fleming, R.B., *The Railway King of Canada*, UBC Press, 1991