

Young Heart

THIS SIMPLE GEORGIAN STRUCTURE IS STILL GOING STRONG, THANKS TO A LOT OF TLC.

BY JANE KELLY



Blake Harley remembers a time not so long ago, when neighbours helped neighbours come harvest time in his Niagara area. He recalls one threshing bee in particular when he and fifteen other men sat around a long plank table and ate their noon meal before head-

ing back out to the fields. "That meal was held in the back kitchen of the Swayze farm, which was kitty corner to our family farm property."

He goes on to say, "If you were a farm lad, you needed only 50% to pass your school year. The school system recognized that your school work might suffer if you were needed



Records indicate that this early Georgian style house was built in 1804, the second brick home to be constructed in Thorold Township in Ontario. A tail wing was added on in 1854 (see "before" picture, opposite).

Even a rainy day doesn't dim the welcoming front hall with its original cross and bible front door and box lock. Doors are referred to as "cross and bible" when the bottom door panels are divided by a cross and the smaller top panels are interpreted as an open bible. Separated sidelight panels were typical of early dwellings of this style.

Draped over the settee in the hallway is a reversible coverlet woven in 1857 by Mary Ann Swayze. The Swayze family were Loyalist settlers and ancestors of Blake Harley. The Harleys began collecting Canadiana in the '60s when pieces were most often offered for sale stripped of their original paint and refinished in a beeswax polish, such as the Quebec cupboard shown.

Georgian Architectural Style

As the name suggests, Georgian architecture flourished during the reigns of the four English monarchs, George I, II, III, and IV, from 1715 to 1820. The style finds its roots in Palladian classicalism made popular by Italian renaissance architect, Andrea Palladio, who found his inspiration in the formal rules of proportion and scale, developed by the early Greeks and Romans.

Georgian architectural style filtered into Canada with the early British immigrants who settled in the Maritimes and Upper Canada and with the United Empire Loyalists who fled the United States to the northern shores of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. The style can be recognized by its austere, balanced facades. Windows are formally arranged around an entrance way. For some dwellings, classic details such as pilasters, pediments and porticos highlight otherwise plain facades. The early Georgian buildings are restrained in their mouldings and cornices when compared to later regency or neo-classic styles and although transom lights were used, sidelights were rarely incorporated into the door surround, but were separate, as demonstrated by the Harley residence.



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for long hours on the farm.” The fact was that Blake Harley’s school work didn’t suffer and he went on to become a dentist—much to his father’s surprise.

Some years later when Blake was an established dentist, the Swayze farm stood abandoned and for sale, beckoning to Blake and his wife Lillian to buy it and restore it to its original grandeur. The Harleys took up the challenge and as they say, “the rest is history”. Their family scrapbook captures the experiences and the memories of those next years, as well as the history and lineage of the house.

Early documents indicate that the main house was built around 1804.

The simple Georgian structure was originally home to Jonathan Hagar and his wife Azubah. The Hagars, in the company of several other United Empire Loyalists crossed the Niagara River and came on horseback when the only roads were Indian trails. It is told that Azubah Hagar rode a horse with her two children in panniers across the horse’s neck, leading a pack horse the whole distance.

Jonathan Hagar died of pneumonia in 1813, leaving his wife Azubah, 43 years of age, with 13 children, the youngest being only a few months old. The house they had built was a simple country home on a slight knoll that allowed a panoramic view

of the surrounding acreage. From a distance the house appears small, but the outside belies the understated elegance of its spacious interior.

Along with the title search and the original property deed, a pictorial story of the rebuilding process is tucked between the covers of the family scrapbook. The photos tell the story of a neglected house, patiently returned to good condition over the 22 years the Harleys have owned it. They also reveal that it was Lillian who managed the renovations of the home while Blake worked in nearby St. Catharines. “Lillian was here early every morning, setting a fire in the wood stove and working until



dark," confirms Blake.

The tail addition to the house, now housing the kitchen, the laundry facilities and the garage, was built in 1854. According to the building contract, "the addition was to be completed in a workman-like manner," and that compensation for the work was to be "room and board and the big white horse." Blake and Lillian have finished the space above the kitchen, which affords bucolic views of the surrounding country, as a studio loft. The loft can be reached by the original "tight winder" staircase leading up from the kitchen below.

When Blake remembers the jobs they tackled during the rehabilitation process, he shakes his head and chuckles. "Five layers of linoleum hid the original butternut and pine floor planks. It was quite a job to get

Blake and I want this home to be a place that evokes good solid memories for our children and our grandchildren.

LILLIAN HARLEY

Blake and Lillian Harley, proud grandparents, are joined for lunch by their daughter-in-law, Shannon and youngest grandson, Sam.

The Harley home is filled with an eclectic collection of art and antiques. One of Lillian's paintings, a still life of chair with a pot of zinnias on the seat hangs in the dining room, as does a Robert Bateman original delicate painting of a sparrow. The early fireplace mantel is original to the room.

The living room was originally two rooms. During early renovations the dividing wall was removed and a large room, suitable for entertaining, was created. The ceiling plaster was removed and the beams left on display.



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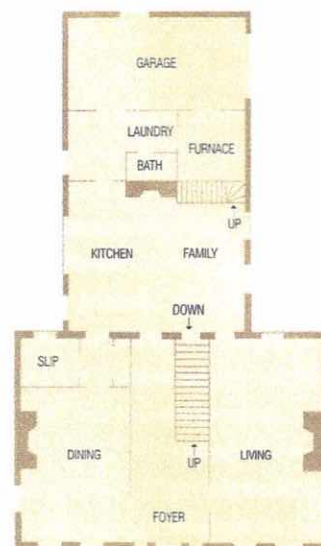
it all off." Although the ground level floors are even widths, some of the upstairs planks are 22 inches wide. Reassembling the black walnut handrail on the staircase required tremendous patience. The handrail sat upon simple rectangular spindles without glue or nails. "It was like a set of dominoes. One spindle would slip out and you would lose the rest, one after the other."

With the renewal complete, Lillian began to furnish the house with antiques. Some of the prized possessions, like the glazed cupboard in the kitchen came from her family home in Blackwater, Lanark County, while others like the chandelier in the dining room came from Blake's home across the road.

Lillian does not limit her collecting to antiques. Works by contemporary

artists as well as early Canadian artists, hang throughout the house. Blake and Lillian, both accomplished artists, have passed their passion for art on to their children and grandchildren. Visitors can view an original Robert Bateman watercolour in the dining room, while in the living room an Audubon-like portrait of a red fox hangs above the fireplace. This wary fellow watches every move that visitors make. Blake explains, "the painting is by Robert Whale, an artist who painted landscapes and portraits in southern Ontario during the mid-19th century." Above their piano is a landscape of Decew Falls in nearby St. Catharines.

Among Lillian's own paintings the one of a pot of zinnias on a high chair means a lot to her. "It represents three of my favourite things in



Nuts and Bolts

STRUCTURE 1 1/2 storey brick

SIZE 2,400 sq. ft.

ELECTRIC 200 amp service

FOUNDATION Stone

HEAT Oil

FACILITIES Well water & septic system



life; my grandchildren who use the high chair, my art and my zinnias. My garden overflows with zinnias in the summer. When the children come to visit, I encourage them to pick as many flowers as they like. Blake and I want this home to be a place that evokes good solid memories for our children and our grandchildren."

Lillian bought a maple cutting block from a butcher in St. Catharines (lower left corner). "That was the easy part," remembers Lillian. "The weight meant getting it home was nearly impossible." To the right of the fireplace, a tight winder staircase leads up to a studio-loft. Fabric art portraying the Harley property is a cheerful addition to the kitchen.

Paintings and soaring brick wall add drama to an upstairs bathroom.

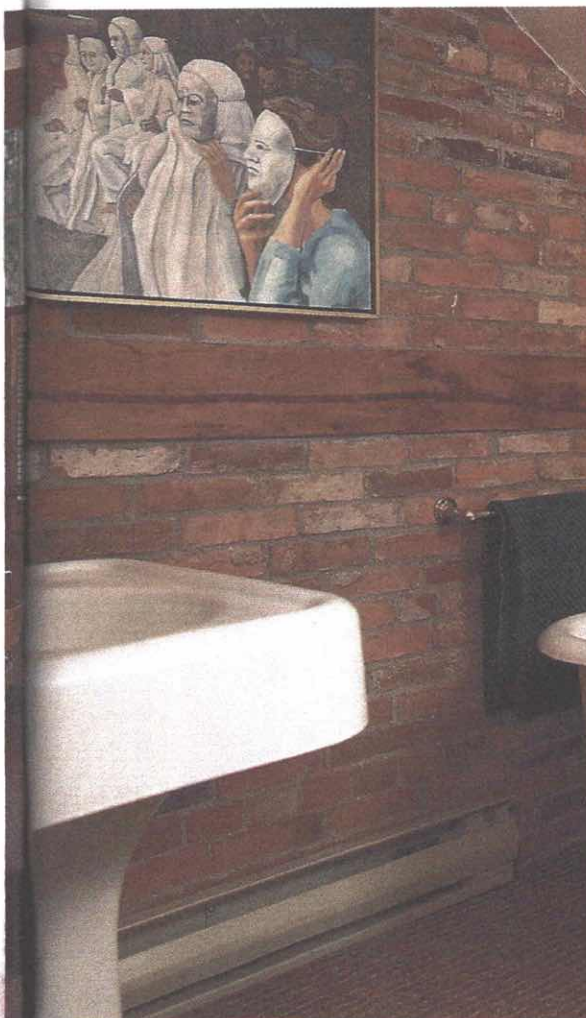
Family portraiture is the art highlighted in the master bedroom. The impressive mantel, a fine Georgian-style piece is original to the house and was refinished during early renovations when the beams were exposed.

Lillian was here early every morning, setting a fire in the wood stove and working until dark.

BLAKE HARLEY

Over the fireplace in the back kitchen hangs a subtly coloured hooked rug given to them by a long-time friend, Louise Wilson, depicting the Harleys' farmhouse,

animals, outbuildings and orchard. To the Harleys the rug symbolizes the activity and warmth of the home they love to share with fortunate friends and family.*





ca. 1819



THE MAGIC WINDOW BARN

James Hagar

“Jamie, I’m pretending that big door is a magic window and I see lots of boys and girls in the future learning things at school!”

Little six-year-old Martha Amanda Hagar (1813–1877) was playing in the new swing beam barn her big brother (James Hagar, 1796–1891) and a master builder were almost done building (Figure 68).

Later, as James and his 19-year-old sister Lydia wandered back to the house, she commented on their precocious little sister. “She sure is smart and has quite an imagination, doesn’t she? Don’t you think it would be great for her to go to the St. Johns Common School west of here in a couple of years? I never got the chance to go, and it’s about time girls got the same chance as you boys.”

Lydia knew full well her older brother completely disagreed with her on this topic. To him, school was for boys, not girls, but he didn’t want to argue with his sister in front of the rest of their ten other siblings and the master builder.

James’ mother, Azubah (1770–1847), noticed the awkward silence. She turned to her son. “James, is everything OK?”

“Oh, it’s nothing, Mother. Lydia wants Martha Amanda to go to St. Johns School down the road. I know I went, and so did Robert, Daniel and Jonathan. But Martha? I know she’s really smart, but girls belong in the house, not at school. Lydia and the rest of our sisters don’t seem to care that our friends and family will laugh at us if we let her go to school. And—and the boys would tease her something terrible!”

Azubah reflected and then chose her words carefully.

“James, remember what your father told you when you were a young lad, just before he died six years ago? Be a leader, not a follower! When someone laughs and questions why you sent your little sister to school, you tell them girls are just as smart as boys! Then look them in the eye and say: ‘We’re sending Martha Amanda to school because it’s 1819!’”

FIGURE 68 The Hagar barn is plain outside, but inside reveals an astonishingly big swing beam. Martha Amanda was looking through the open north door.

THE HAGAR barn was an accidental find. A neighbour suggested going to see it. The author was doubtful it was that old because its gambrel roof, which wasn't popularized in Ontario until about 1890, implied it wasn't old.³⁴ However, inside it was definitely older. The barn is currently owned by Dr. Blake and Lillian Harley.

This ground barn had been dramatically altered from a gable roofline to a gambrel long after it was built. Its 36 ft long, tapered oak swing beam is magnificent, boasting a mid-depth of 26.5 in., an end depth of 20 in. and a width of 14 in. (Figure 69 and Figure 70). It is estimated to weigh a staggering 1,315 kg.

It took a while to forensically determine how earlier owners had altered the barn to a gambrel roof (Figure 70 and Figure 71). The barn started as a vertical queen post barn, with a swing beam bent cross-section as shown. Later, the roof was peeled off and a beam installed transversely on top of, and about 3 ft beyond, the existing purlin beams. These beams then supported short posts extending to still-higher new purlin beams for a gambrel roof.

In Figure 71, notice the two vertical queen posts blackened from oil used to lubricate the axles of the wagon-rack-lifting wheel. Between the blackened queens and angle braces, empty mortises provided evidence of a former tie beam. Former diagonal braces are missing,

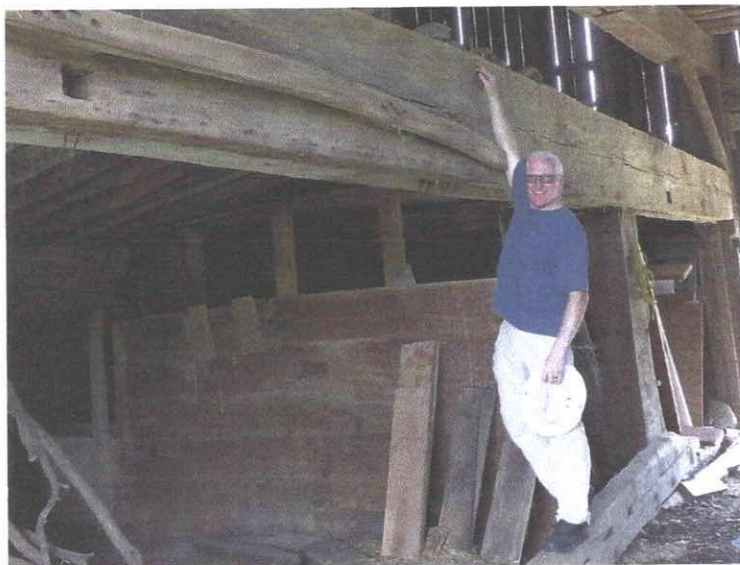


FIGURE 69 The author demonstrates the immensity of the tapered, oak swing beam. Oak grew better than white pine on the heavier soils above the Niagara Escarpment.

³⁴ (Duncan 2007)

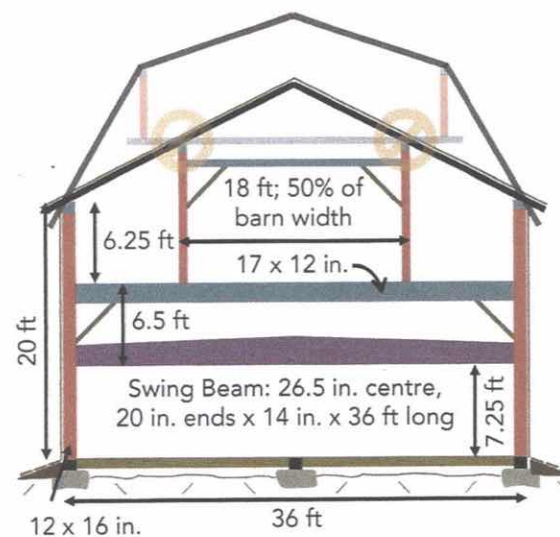


FIGURE 70 The original swing beam bent is shown in full colour, while structures added later (beams and posts for gambrel roof and wagon-rack-lifting wheels) are faded. Vertical queen posts don't extend down to the swing beam unlike those in some similar barns.

as the empty mortise slots are below the braces. Rafter from the old gable roof were removed, shortened and reinstalled on the upper slope of the gambrel roof. Sawn rafters were installed on the lower slope of the gambrel roof.

This work was done at dangerous heights, inspiring one to wonder how many workers were mangled or killed building and renovating barns—there w



FIGURE 71 This odd renovation was perhaps done in the 1800s to gain precious mow space and install a wagon-rack-lifting wheel.

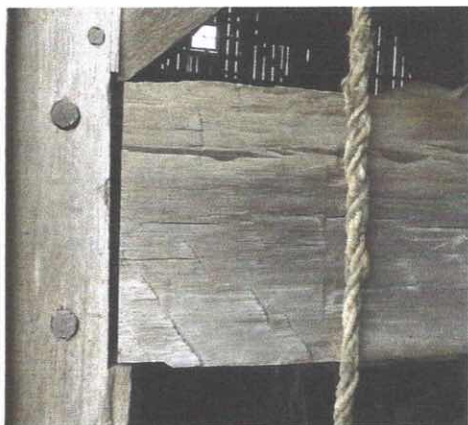


FIGURE 72 The 1.75 in. diameter pins are an indicator of greater age, but they pale in size to the 19.5 in. square shoulder cut on the mortise-and-tenon joint.



FIGURE 73 Hoisting pin holes were larger than pin holes in mortise-and-tenon joints because large pins were needed to withstand the stress of lifting heavy bents.



FIGURE 74 This crude mow of loose hay resting on the swing beam and beam of adjacent bent was likely built 70+ years ago, when loose hay was still common.

Workers Compensation in those days. Tie beams were completely cut out on two of the five barn bents because they were in the way of a metal hay track installed many years later.

The swing beam's mortise-and-tenon joints have large 1.75 in. pins, an indicator of greater age, and they are a whopping 13.5 in. apart because of the great beam depth. The diagonal brace between tie beam and end post just above it is pinned, an unusual feature in barns and also pointing to a likely greater age (Figure 72).

Early-era barns often had hoisting pin holes at the top of the end posts (Figure 73). Bents were assembled flat on the ground, then winched up into their final vertical positions using block-and-tackle devices attached to pins placed in these hoisting pin holes. Lifting devices may have been needed for early barns since there were fewer people around to help out. Barns installed later did not have hoisting pins, likely relying on building bees with dozens of people to tilt up bents using pike poles and plenty of person power.

Slender tree logs were placed longitudinally on top of the swing beam and a beam of an adjacent bent, 12.5 ft away, to form a crude mow for loose hay above (Figure 74). The beam of the adjacent bent is badly deflected from years of loading. It also sits at a lower elevation than the swing beam, meaning the floor of this mow sloped downward away from the swing beam. Several other barns had similar downwardly sloped mows. This may have been by design to help ensure loose hay or straw didn't slide off the mow to the threshing floor.

Because this is a ground barn, sill and sleeper beams lie under the (former) wooden plank floor. Sills would typically sit on large fieldstones to both distribute weight loads to the ground and keep sills dry off the ground. They were often made from white oak as it could stand up to wet conditions. Just like joists vary in size and spacing and run in different directions depending on the house size and orientation, sleeper beam configurations also varied depending on beam size, spacing, barn size and orientation. Figure 75 shows remnants of the floor, buried in gravel at a later date, likely because the floor got worn out or because the owners wanted to discourage critters from living underneath.



FIGURE 75 A 12 × 12 in. sill beam runs longitudinally the centre length of the barn, with 6 × 6 in sleeper beams transversely, 3 ft on centre.