



Cover: Bellevue House
Below: John A. Macdonald, Isabella Macdonald

Brief history

Bellevue House owes its fame to the fact that John A. Macdonald, who later became Canada's first prime minister, lived here for a year in 1848-49. Even without its illustrious tenant, however, the villa would be of historical interest as an expression of the affluence that accompanied Kingston's short-lived boom in the early 1840's.

Although Kingston has for much of her history been overshadowed by her larger neighbours, Montreal and Toronto, the town did know two brief periods of glory in the early 19th century. The first came during the War of 1812, when Kingston was the principal British naval base on Lake Ontario. Then the *St. Lawrence*, the largest warship in the Royal Navy, lay abuilding in the Kingston dockyards. There was constant activity with the coming and going of troops and civil and military officials, and the added excitement of a threatened American attack, which never materialized.

The excitement died down with the coming of peace in 1814, but the continued presence of the military and the shipyards helped Kingston avoid the minor depression that followed the war in most of Canada. The following two decades were in fact ones of prosperity and steady, if unspectacular, growth. As the population of Upper Canada increased, Kingston's commerce and shipping flourished, for the town was the gateway to the upper province. The prosperity of these years is reflected in the construction of a number of new buildings—many of them still standing—such as Counter's commercial block, "Plymouth Square", on Ontario Street, and the fine new mansions which went up just west of the town limits: Grant's Alwington House, Summerhill, Edgehill, St. Helen's, and the villa later to be



called Bellevue. By 1840 the stage was set for Kingston's second great moment.

In the wake of the Rebellions of 1837 Lord Durham made his famous Report recommending the legislative union of Lower and Upper Canada. This meant the naming of one capital where before there had been two, and there were several claimants for the honour: Quebec and Toronto, the former capitals of Lower and Upper Canada; Montreal, the greatest city in the province; and Kingston, which had harboured such ambitions since Simcoe proclaimed the government of Upper Canada in the tiny Loyalist settlement in 1792. Although the smallest of the contenders, Kingston did have a legitimate claim to consideration. Geographically it was centrally located between the concentrations of population, east and west, and it had none of the unfortunate associations with the Rebellions shared by the larger cities. The decision was announced by Governor General Lord Sydenham early in 1841: Kingston it would be.

The announcement initiated a period of feverish activity. Accommodation had to be found for the Legislature and for the numerous officials, legislators and over a hundred civil servants who would descend upon the town. A building boom began and many of the recently constructed homes and offices were leased. The new General Hospital was converted to legislative chambers, and Alwington House (which was destroyed by fire in 1958) became the Governor General's residence. In the brief period Kingston was the capital, three Governors General were to live, and two (Sydenham and Bagot) to die, in Alwington House. The arrival of government also stimulated Kingston's commerce, producing a climate of prosperity and unbounded optimism. In keeping with the town's new dignity, plans were laid for a magnificent new City Hall, which was ultimately to cost £28,000. Its classical facade recently restored, it still stands, one of Ontario's most impressive municipal buildings and a monument to Kingston's halcyon days.

Among those who shared in Kingston's boom was the grocer and entrepreneur Charles Hales. Hales had probably come to Kingston in the thirties, and opened a grocery store on Front (now Ontario) Street. Business was good and he expanded his interests to take in shares in shipping, the new marine railway, and real estate. In this way he built up a modest fortune and in the late thirties he acquired property to the west of town in the fashionable neighbourhood of Alwington House and St. Helen's. Here,



between 1838 and 1840, he built his new house in the Italian villa style then popular in England. Because of its exotic, almost frivolous appearance compared to the staid limestone buildings of old Kingston, and the commercial background of the builder, it was popularly known as "Pekoe Pagoda" and "Tea Caddy Castle".

The villa was one of the marks of affluence in nineteenth century Canada, a large house set in landscaped grounds just beyond the town limits. Here the man of affairs could enjoy the fruits of his enterprise in a quiet, semi-rural setting, without getting too far away from his place of business. Most Canadian villas were built by local craftsmen, using pattern books of designs then in favour in England or the United States; yet they were not merely slavish copies, for local building techniques and materials gave

The master bedroom



each house an individual character.

When Kingston became the capital, Hales, like many other Kingstonians, leased his new villa. He also built the row of houses immediately to the south (Hales Cottages) to be rented to government personnel. The bubble burst, however, in 1844 when the capital was removed to Montreal. Property values fell, houses stood vacant, businesses failed, and businessmen went bankrupt in the ensuing depression. Hales may have been one of the casualties, for he continued to lease his villa to a succession of tenants. In August 1848 the house was rented by Kingston's young Member of the Legislative Assembly, John A. Macdonald.

Macdonald's family had emigrated to Canada from Scotland in 1820, when John was five. Most of his youth was

The dining room



spent in and around Kingston, where he was educated and received his legal training. He opened his first law office there in 1835, in time to share in the town's boom years. By the early forties he had become involved in municipal politics and in 1844 was elected to the provincial Legislature. In 1848, when he rented Hales' villa, he had already been, for a brief period, a member of the provincial cabinet and was clearly a rising star in the Conservative party. Although that party was now out of office, and its fortunes at a low ebb, the move to the more pleasant surroundings and more opulent atmosphere of Bellevue—as Macdonald called the house—was consistent with his growing confidence and social status.

The Macdonalds had other reasons for the move, however, for Isabella, John's young wife, was very ill. It was

hoped that the country quiet of Bellevue would aid her convalescence, but her health did not improve, and she remained an invalid for most of their stay in the house. Then, in September 1848, just after they had moved in, their infant son died. In spite of these misfortunes, the Macdonalds' time in Bellevue, seen in retrospect, was one of the last occasions when public responsibilities allowed John to enjoy something of the normal routine of Scottish-Canadian domestic life. A year after they had taken the house, reverses in his law practice caused Macdonald to move to smaller, less pretentious quarters in downtown Kingston.

Macdonald's rising political career, which led eventually to the leadership of his party, the Prime Minister's office and a knighthood, kept him away from Kingston for in-

The drawing room



creasingly longer periods. After Isabella's death in 1857 John became even more of the public man, less the private citizen who had sought a domestic refuge in Bellevue. It was not until his second marriage in 1867 that Macdonald would again have a home of his own, and by that time official duties overshadowed domestic ones.

During the century following the Macdonalds' departure, Bellevue was occupied by a number of prominent Kingstonians, many of whom altered the building to suit their own needs. Yet in the popular mind it continued to be associated with Sir John A. Macdonald, who had lived in it for so brief a period. In 1964 Bellevue was acquired by the federal government as a National Historic Park and restored to the period when it was occupied by its most famous tenant. Among the many Kingston buildings associated with Sir John, none is so distinctive or worthy of preservation as Bellevue; for in addition to its historical connections it warrants attention in its own right as one of the earliest and finest examples of the Italian villa in Canada.

Canada's National Historic Parks / Major Sites

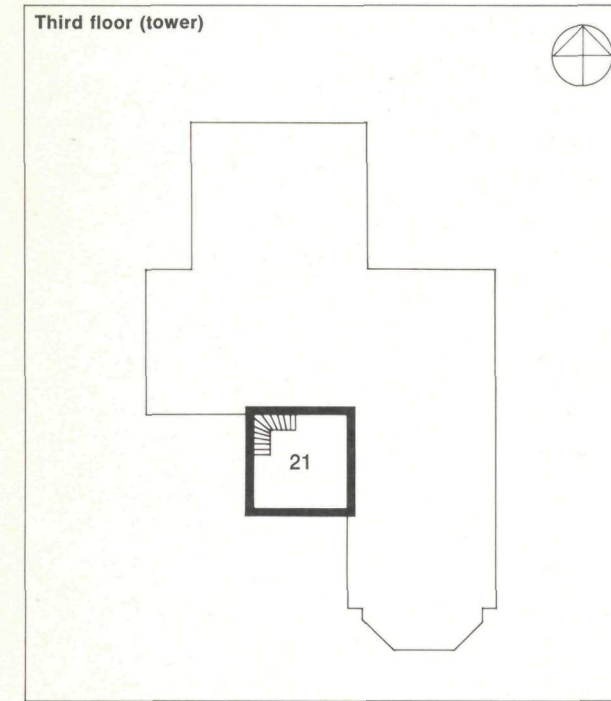
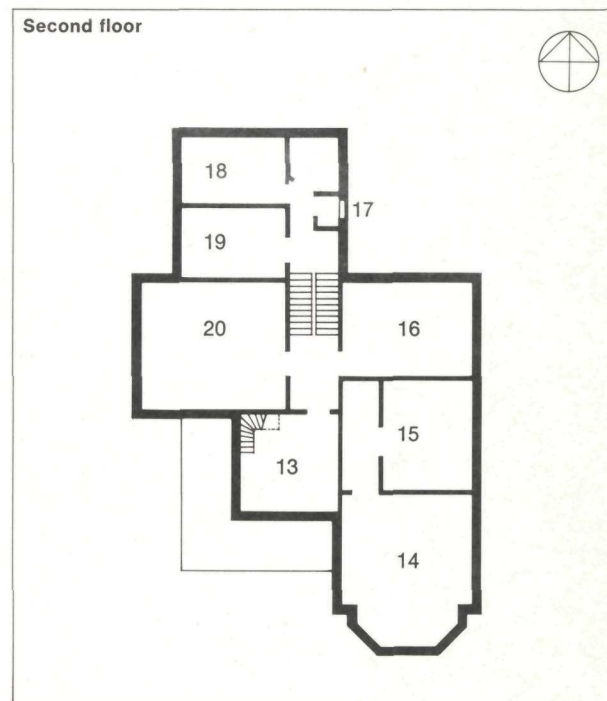
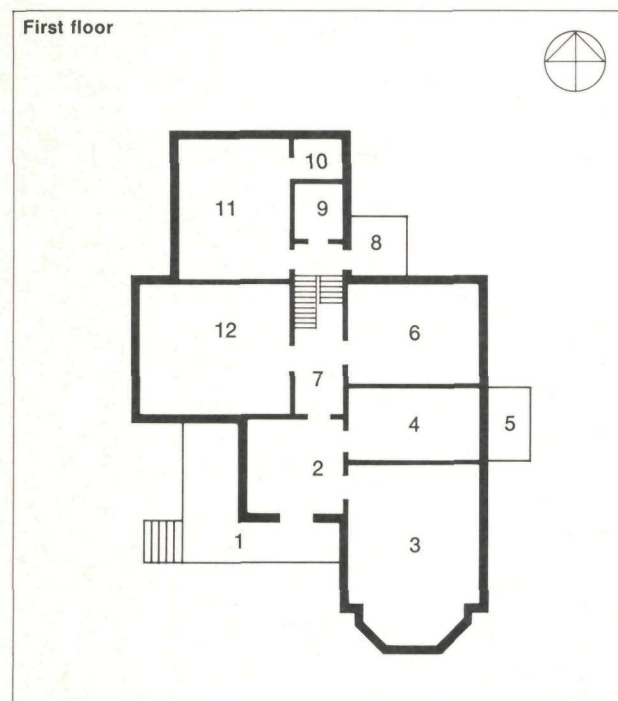
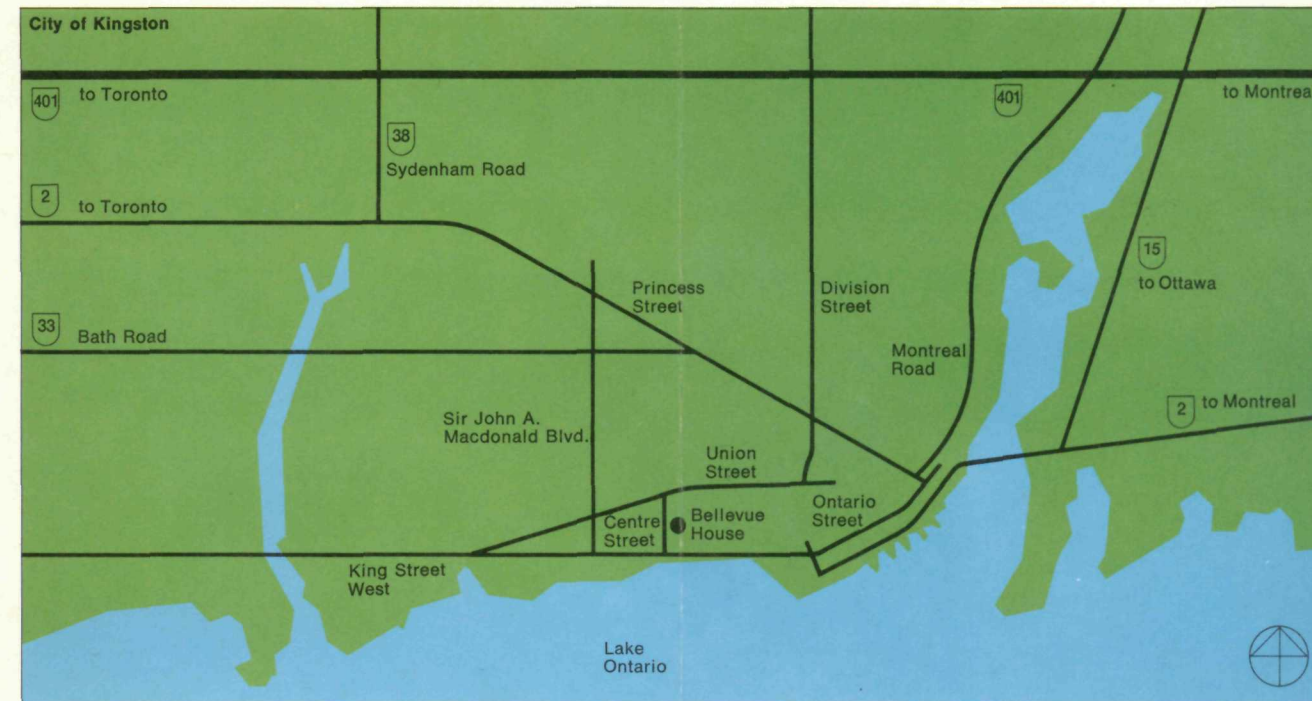
- Newfoundland*
Cape Spear, Castle Hill, Signal Hill.
- Nova Scotia*
Alexander Graham Bell Museum, Fort Anne, Grand Pré, Fortress of Louisbourg, Port Royal, Halifax Defence Complex: Halifax Citadel, Prince of Wales Martello Tower, York Redoubt.
- Prince Edward Island*
Fort Amherst.
- New Brunswick*
Carleton Martello Tower, Fort Beauséjour, St. Andrews Blockhouse.
- Québec*
Cartier-Brebeuf Park, Côteau-du-lac, Fort Chambly, Fort Lennox, Québec City Walls and Gates, Sir Wilfrid Laurier's House.
- Ontario*
Bellevue House, Fort George, Fort Malden, Fort Wellington, Queenston Heights, Brock's Monument, Woodside, Fort St. Joseph.
- Manitoba*
Lower Fort Garry, Fort Prince of Wales.
- Saskatchewan*
Batoche, Battleford, Fort Walsh.
- Alberta*
Rocky Mountain House.
- British Columbia*
Fort Langley, Fort Rodd Hill, St. Roch, Craigflower Manor, Fort St. James.
- Yukon*
Palace Grand Theatre, S.S. Keno, S.S. Klondike.

National Historic Parks/Sites in Ontario

- 1 *Fort Malden*, Amherstburg, remains of defence post first built in 1797-1799.
- 2 *Woodside*, Kitchener, boyhood home of William Lyon Mackenzie King, 10th prime minister of Canada.
- 3 *Fort George*, Niagara-on-the-Lake, reconstruction of a fortification built in 1797-1801; and *Queenston Heights*, site of major American invasion, critical battle and American defeat during War of 1812. Monument to British Major General, Isaac Brock, killed during repulse.
- 4 *Bellevue House*, Kingston, home of first Canadian prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald.
- 5 *Fort Wellington*, Prescott, defence post built in 1812-1814, includes blockhouse dating from 1839 and museum. *Fort St. Joseph*, 40 miles southeast of Sault Ste. Marie, ruins of defence post built in 1796 to guard fur trading storehouses.

National Parks in Ontario

- A *Point Pelee*, at Point Pelee, bird sanctuary, commercial accommodation in vicinity.
- B *Georgian Bay Islands*, Honey Harbour, interpretive program, camping, commercial accommodation available.
- C *St. Lawrence Islands*, Mallorytown, water playground, fishing, boating, camping, commercial accommodation nearby. *Pukaskwa*, northern Lake Superior wilderness area, not yet accessible by highway, in process of development.



Bellevue House

See also "What to look for"

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1 Front porch | 18 Office, former servant's room |
| 2 Entrance hall | 19 Servant's room |
| 3 Drawing room | 20 Display room |
| 4 Music room | 21 The tower room |
| 5 Side porch | |
| 6 Morning room | |
| 7 Inner hall | |
| 8 Back porch | Basement not shown. |
| 9 Pantry | Scullery below dining and morning rooms (now toilets). |
| 10 Larder | |
| 11 Kitchen | |
| 12 Dining room | |
| 13 Study | |
| 14 Master bedroom | |
| 15 Dressing room | |
| 16 The baby's room | |
| 17 Original linen closet | |

What to look for

The entrance hall

In the earlier days, guests of John A. Macdonald would have paused to hang their hats and coats on the lyre-shaped hall-stand, and perhaps placed their gloves on the table with its "Paul and Virginia" candle holders, so named after a novel of those days. Beneath the floor is a cistern which provided the house with water collected from the roof. Notice the thick walls, which helped to earn one of the titles of the house—The Tea Caddy Castle.

The music room

The music room can be separated from the drawing room by sliding doors. This room looks out over the "formal garden" and along a pathway that used to lead to a summer house. Beneath this floor is a little "secret" tunnel which provided ventilation for the scullery below.

The drawing room

Looking through the archway into the drawing room we see Hales Cottages through the window. On each side of the fireplace are the bell-pulls which were used to summon a servant. The wire which activated the bells in the scullery ran through little pipes in the walls. The furnishings reflect the time when conversation was a practised art, encouraged by the taking of tea, which was kept on the tea poy beside the table. The ladies would retire after dinner to this room to gossip and sing old ballads around the piano. In the winter the pole screen would shield the face from the fire, for a pallid complexion was the mark of gentility. The large couch is in Regency style and may have been in the house when John A. Macdonald was here.

The inner hall

We now pass through the inner hall to the dining room. In passing, we see the six-plate stove placed beside the "heat hole" which allows warm air to circulate into the other rooms. The panels in the wall would be replaced in summer.

The dining room

The dining room reflects a warmth and hospitality which was the mark of a good host. The large soup tureen and chafing dish standing on the "what-not" beside the fireplace are waiting to be filled again, and along with the coffee urn, wooden cheese coaster, decanter and other paraphernalia, provide mute evidence of pleasant activity in bygone times. This room is illuminated by candles; note

the mythological references of the candelabra design and the table centre-piece beneath it. On dull days, even more than normally, the house was dark inside, for although the Argand lamp (a gas lamp with tubular wick) had been invented, candles, lard, whale oil, camphene lamps, etc., had to be used to read by. The fueling and cleaning of the many lamps was a task each day for a servant. Other items of interest are the Canton China, Spode and Ironstone pieces on the "what-not" and the shelves, the "Argyle" for melted butter or gravy, and the wine cooler under the sideboard. But here, John A. Macdonald often ate alone. Sometimes he would help his wife in on a chair to the table, and at other times they ate together at a little table brought in to her room for the purpose.

The morning room

In the morning room, a family would have taken breakfast and engaged in light housekeeping such as sewing, and giving orders for the day to the servants. This room, however, was used by Mrs. Macdonald as her bedroom. The couch beside the bed may have belonged to Isabella. Beside the bed and on the little table are some items an invalid would have used, such as a case for medicines, and smelling salts.

Even when John A. Macdonald and Isabella arrived at Bellevue, Isabella was ill with a persistent cough and violent pains of neuralgia. Yet, in spite of this, her baby was often brought to her and she managed to sew a waistcoat for John, about which he wrote "which I am able to sport as a winter vest".

The wallpaper in this room is of a design of the 1840's, as it is throughout the house. The little desk is called a Davenport, named after the person who first had one made to this design. In the far corner is a screened space for clothing and the "convenience", reminding us of the great changes in living conditions since Isabella dwelt here.

At the back door we glance out into what once was a stableyard between the house and the carriage house. This area has not been restored, but a pile of wood and a chopping block suggest one of the activities performed there.

A water stand and basin suggest the stableman may have washed here before entering the kitchen for his meals.

In the kitchen on the right, we see a small room which was probably the pantry. Originally, the shelves occupied all the walls (the cupboards were added to conceal modern electrical fittings) and these shelves likely provided a place

for such items as you see here. The preservation of food was a great problem; flies from the stable, other insects, moulds, mice, and the damp continually attacked what was edible. In this room fruits from the trees by the house and the lower garden were kept after being "bottled" or dried, and likewise, sugar and spice and other things nice were stored here, along with molasses and flour from the mill.

The kitchen and larder

Here we see the fireplace with its mantle and crane. Cooking at that time was still done over the open fire, although ranges were becoming popular. The brass clockwork spit slowly rotated the meat before the fire. The cauldron would contain the marrow-bone soup and the kettle, hot water.

The bake-oven is in the corner, with its own fire-box underneath. In front of the fireplace is a chair for a manservant, and beside it the "grog", chewing tobacco and spittoon.

The pine table would be well used, for meals for the servants, drawing chickens, preparing vegetables, baking and other chores.

The sooty and greasy hands of the servants account for the preference for dark coloured paint for the woodwork, which is the original colour. The walls too, are painted the original pale venetian red lime-wash colour. The steep back stairs lead to the servants' rooms, for they were not allowed to use the main staircase except when called.

In the northeast corner is the larder; it is in the coldest corner of the house, and this room would likely contain the meat, milk, cheese and butter, etc.

The servant's bedroom

The rope "springs" support a straw-and-corn-husk-filled mattress, but this was comfortable enough after the long day of work from morn till night, six-and-a-half days a week.

A narrow corridor leads to what once was another bedroom and the trap door to the servants' staircase. The little room to the right was originally a linen cupboard. Note the bathtub hanging on the wall. Hot water had to be carried from the kitchen fireplace, and the dirty water thrown . . . well, through the window or back door.

The baby's room

The baby was born in August 1847, and here at Bellevue he was "in high spirits and capital condition". Perhaps he spent some time in the cradle, which was reputedly

brought from Scotland by John A. Macdonald's parents.

At other times we are told he used to "sit most contentedly" in bed with his mother and play with his toys. The nursemaid may have occupied a bed such as the one you see.

On September 21, 1848, young John Alexander died, perhaps from "convulsions" or a terrible fall. The room is furnished as it might have been while the baby lived. Both the cradle and the cast iron stove are in the Gothic style, one of the styles the Victorians revived from earlier days. The hole in the floor allowed heat to rise into the room from below, and could have been used for another arrangement of stove pipes.

The dressing room

This room is as it might have been in those days, with its Sheraton shaving stand for the straight razors; cheval mirror and wardrobe, for there are no cupboards in the house. The leather hat box for the tall hats when travelling, and the washbasin with a convenient hole in the bottom are companions for the little stove which would remove the chill from the air while one bathed in the shoe-shaped tub.

The study

We climb a few steps into the study in the tower. Two "French windows" open onto the front porch roof; an alcove formed by a stone arch and brick curtain wall, duly plastered, contains a bookcase. We are informed John A. had an extensive library in which his nephew loved to read books bought in England during the visit of 1842 when John met his wife Isabella Clark in Scotland. The large dictionaries belonged to him. A hanging corner cupboard, military chest, an interesting old globe, Regency desk and chair, soft leather chair, and library step-chair complete the furnishings. A box of wooden tapers, or "spills", hangs on the wall, and would be used to light the lamps, and if we look in the convex mirror we can see the shape of the busy curving little stairs which lead to the tower room above.

The master bedroom

This room is dominated by a six-foot-long, four-poster bed, with drapes which could be drawn to protect the sleeper from the "night vapours". The mattress and bolster are filled with feathers, and a "pine tree" design quilt covers the bed. Beside the bed is a "pig" which would be filled

with hot water at night to keep one's feet warm.

The large pine blanket-chest would have been filled with blankets, clothing, and other treasures of the household, for many such things would be locked away. The classical urn on the stove contained water and perhaps some aromatic spirits to flavour the air. Notice the desk with its quill pen and sealing wax and columns matching those on the front porch.

Display room

As you leave the restored rooms of the house, you may look into the room containing a brief account of the life of John A. Macdonald, and glance out of the window of this former beautiful bedroom with its delightful balcony, reminding us of far off Venice and Italy. Bellevue was an "Italian Villa" in style, although it was also known locally as Molasses Hall, Muscovado Cottage, Tea Caddy Castle, and John A. Macdonald called it the Pekoe Pagoda, all of course in reference to the builder who built it from the profits of his importing business. An Italian Villa would certainly have been most unusual among the grey stone and wooden houses of Kingston, which was then on the fringe of Western civilization.