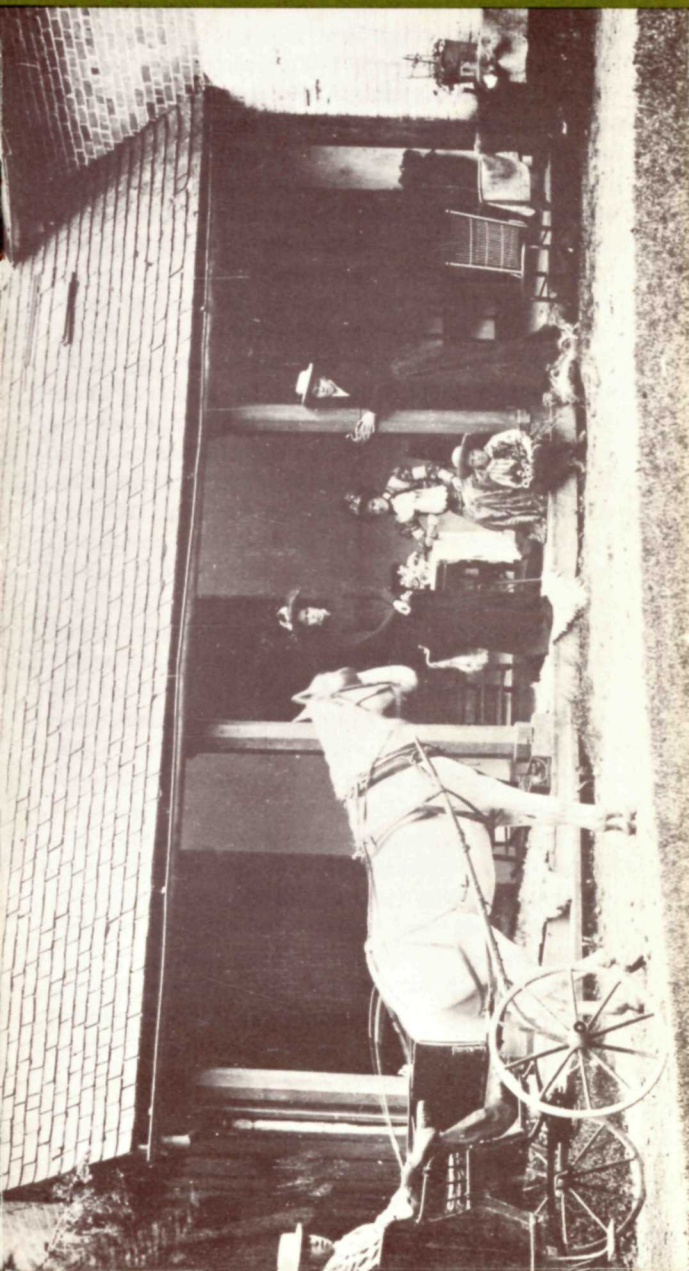


Parks Canada

Woodside National Historic Park

Ontario



Cover:

The Kings at Woodside: from left, William Lyon Mackenzie King, Billy the horse, Bella, Mrs. King, Max and Jennie.

A memorable residence

“Woodside” was the boyhood home of William Lyon Mackenzie King, Prime Minister of Canada from 1921 to 1930 and between 1935 and 1948. He lived here from 1886 to 1891 with his parents, John and Isabel King, an older sister, Isabel (Bella), a younger sister, Janet (Jennie), and his young brother Dougall Macdougall (Max). In 1891 the Kings’ eldest son left to attend the University of Toronto, but he spent most of his holidays at Woodside until the summer of 1893, when the whole family moved to Toronto.

Mackenzie King resided here only between the ages of eleven and sixteen, yet he remarked over fifty-five years later, “The years that left the most abiding of all impressions and most in the way of family association were those lived at Woodside.” The King children have left ample evidence in their correspondence of their affection for Woodside and its 11-1/2 acres of grounds at the time they lived there, though the family never owned the property.

A new house near Berlin

The house had been built in 1853 for its designer, James Colquhoun, a British barrister and father of four who had recently moved to Waterloo County. He called the place “Woodside” after a family home in Britain. At that time, the early Victorian country residence was a mile or so beyond the limits of the village of Berlin (now Kitchener).

Berlin was then an up-and-coming settlement of less than 1,000. In 1853 it also gained its first bank, telegraph office and English newspaper, and had recently been chosen county town of Waterloo though it was not yet incorporated as a village. In 1857 Berlin became an important stop on the Grand Trunk railway; it also acquired 14-year-old John King and his widowed mother as residents.

Parents from opposing camps

In 1869 John King, a graduate of Osgoode Hall, moved back to Berlin and began his law practice. While at law school in Toronto, he had become engaged to a Toronto

resident, Isabel Grace Mackenzie. She was the youngest child of William Lyon Mackenzie, the crusading journalist, politician, and leader of the 1837 Rebellion in Upper Canada. During the Rebellion, John King’s father, a British soldier, had been stationed with the Royal Artillery at Kingston, Ontario, and had fired on a small invading force from the United States, which was not led, in person or in spirit, by the fiery rebel. Mackenzie King was nevertheless much impressed by the drama of his antagonistic grandfathers, and during his political career made much of the union of their descendants, which took place in 1872.

The Kings at Woodside

By the time John King leased Woodside from the Colquhouns, he had four children and had built up a fairly substantial law practice. He was the attorney for the county and various municipal authorities, acted as Crown Counsel, was a solicitor for the Canadian Bank of Commerce, and had a branch office in Galt. (He left Berlin in 1893 to take up a lectureship at Osgoode Hall.)

Woodside’s previous tenant had been John King’s uncle, Dougall Macdougall, County Registrar and formerly editor and publisher of the Berlin *Telegraph*, who no doubt was responsible for attracting his nephew to the Colquhoun estate.

Woodside’s decor

The Kings leased an unfurnished 10-room house, and equipped it with some of the pieces that are currently in this restoration. The rest of its furnishings are representative of an upper-middle class home in Ontario in the early 1890s. They reflect the prevailing late-Victorian taste for reception rooms which sometimes seem to modern eyes to be crammed with excessively ornamented furniture and bric-a-brac, but which to Victorians created an impression of comfort, opulence, and generous hospitality. Almost inevitably, large sub-tropical potted plants competed for space and attention with plaster busts, wax flowers, beadwork, hanging plates, gilt-framed pictures suspended from picture rails and propped up on easels, petit-point mottoes, and tiered

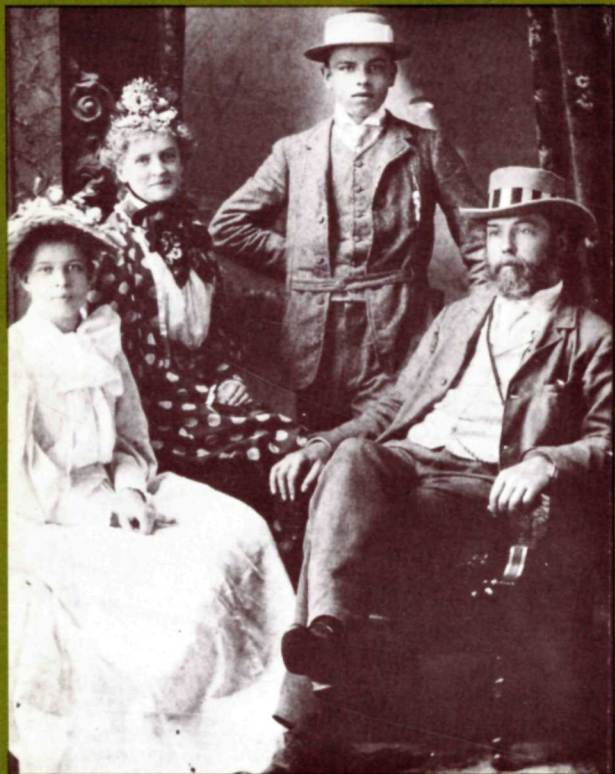
Isabel Grace King in 1885.



John King in 1892.



Bella, William and their parents, John and Isabel King.



Isabel («Bella») King.



whatnots and fretwork brackets ranged with souvenirs and more bric-a-brac. Overstuffed and tufted chairs and ottomans made a Victorian parlour an upholsterer's paradise. Dry goods merchants must also have thrived on the contemporary penchant for covering windows and furnishings with layers of fabric, which, more often than not, was garnished with tassels, flounces, ruffles and fringes. Mirrors and framed pictures did not escape festooning fabrics; doilies, antimacassars and pillow shams were all part of the general scheme.

Beyond the reception rooms, the standard of furnishing and the quantities of ornamental bric-a-brac perhaps declined, though in virtually every room there was still as abundance of pattern — four or five different ones decorating the wallpapers, the carpets and throw rugs, the chairs, sofas, cushions and curtains.

Among the King family's unique possessions were relics from their famous ancestor. The large marble-topped table in the parlour (or drawing room) is said to have been carved by William Lyon Mackenzie. A Vice-regal Proclamation advertising a reward of 1,000 pounds for his capture, dead or alive, was also treasured by the family and was retained by Mackenzie King throughout his life.

Politics and religion

During his public career, Mackenzie King avowed that he had been strongly influenced by the example of his rebel grandfather, and that, as a boy, he had dreamed of representing North York, Mackenzie's constituency. He added that he was certainly inspired by the interest his parents took in public affairs, and probably told his first biographer that the family met regularly in the library to exchange views on public issues and to read and discuss books, magazines and daily press articles.

John King's interest in politics was more than academic. He was President of the North Waterloo Liberal Association, had much experience electioneering, and wrote many articles for Liberal newspapers and journals.

John King and his family were also deeply involved with the Presbyterian Church in Berlin. Besides taking part in church groups and social events and attending

services regularly, the family met in the evenings for divine worship in the library.

Home entertainments

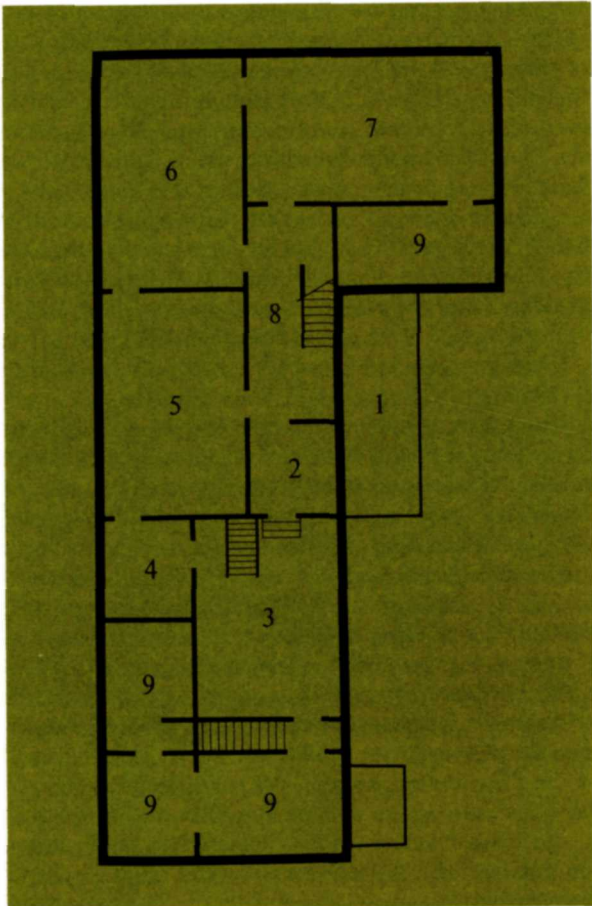
All members of the family also regularly participated in singing hymns and popular airs around the piano in the parlour. The King children and their mother could play the piano (Mrs. King had given piano lessons before her marriage), though, according to Jennie, William mastered only "Home Sweet Home" and "God Save The Queen." Apparently, John King would accompany the pianist on the castanets.

The Kings were an exceedingly hospitable family, and the correspondence between the two girls and William (when he was in Toronto) reveals a succession of overnight guests, calls, soirées, teas, suppers, and parties, as well as a full quota of similar invitations for the Kings. Among the activities enjoyed during these congenial occasions at Woodside were little plays and skits, dancing, taffy pulls, tea-leaf readings, and a game called "Jenkins Up, Jenkins Down." Max also took every opportunity of showing visitors how well he could play the piano in the early period of his apprenticeship in 1892.

In other leisure hours, cricket and croquet were played on the front lawn, and, when they were not entertaining guests, the members of the King family pursued their special interests. William was quite an avid gardener, so much so that Max wrote to him, "I wonder how the garden will get along without your help." Both girls were fond of skating, attended dancing and calisthenics classes for a period, and otherwise occupied themselves with fancy work and books. Max collected stamps, and, like his older brother, was taken with chemistry experiments. Some of the ones he had mastered by the spring of '92 were: "gas fumigation by mixing sulphuric acid and spirits of salts together, blue light, explosives, etc., etc." One of Mrs. King's hobbies was painting on china; she may have decorated the commode set currently on the washstand in the master bedroom. John King apparently curled at the rink in Berlin, and was inordinately fond of reading aloud to his family. The latter habit caused Jennie to complain in a letter, "Father

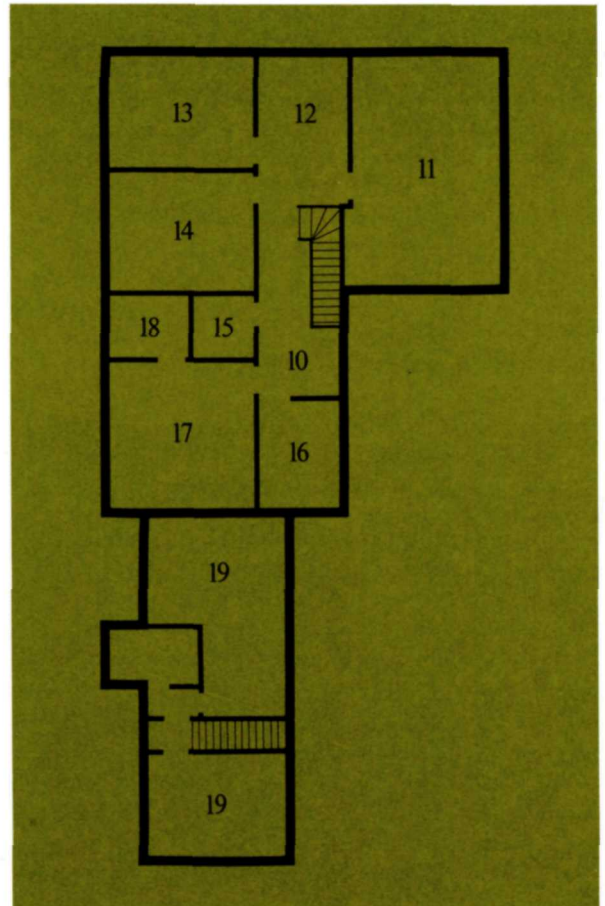
First floor plan

1 Porch. 2 Vestibule. 3 Kitchen. 4 Pantry. 5 Dining Room.
6 Library. 7 Drawing room or Parlour. 8 Hall.
9 Administration area. Wash rooms and Interpretive display
area downstairs.



Second floor plan

10 Hall. 11 Guest room. 12 "Cosy corner". 13 Girls' room.
14 Boys' room. 15 Linen cupboard. 16 Sewing room.
17 Master bedroom. 18 Dressing room. 19 Administration
area.



has just commenced to read aloud out of the *Presbyterian* & dear knows when he will *let up* . . . It is lovely to hear him read but not when you are trying to write.”

The daily routine

Of course, there were reasonably strict limits on the quantity of entertainments in which the King children were allowed to participate. The girls were refused permission to go to parties improperly chaperoned, and a rule was made in 1891, to Max's displeasure, that he was not to come into the parlour except on Friday nights. William and, in his absence, Jennie were called upon to “keep” their father's office when he was out of town, and to otherwise assist with the clerical work. Nothing could interfere with the children's copious church activities, their allotted “reading hour,” and with their lessons. These they were obliged to do on weekdays between about 6:30 and 9:30 p.m., at which time, in 1892, they were required to go to their beds.

All the children attended public schools in Berlin, where it was “not particularly remembered” of the future Prime Minister that he had “set the Grand River afire.” In 1889 Bella was sent to a girls' school in Toronto for a year, and in 1891 a governess, Miss Siebert, was employed, who instructed the three King children in music and German. She lived with the family at Woodside, shared in many of their activities, and was apparently well-liked. She was probably a recent immigrant to Canada, as Bella surmised in a letter, “Miss Siebert is no doubt asleep with all the rest, dreaming of her beloved Emperor or Germany.” She departed abruptly in January of 1893.

Besides Miss Siebert, the Kings employed two servants, usually a “man-of-all-work” and his wife. However, during the period that William was at university, a virtual parade of servants passed through Woodside, and for long periods the Kings were without a servant. Then Max had to do the out-of-doors work, and the girls were required to do so many chores around the house that Bella was prompted to exclaim, “Of all jobs in the face of the earth, house-cleaning is the worst!” Some of the servants departed because they displeased the Kings

The King brothers, photographed about 1899.



William Lyon Mackenzie King in 1891.

– these included Katy, who once performed an unsolicited war dance around Miss Siebert and would not let Mrs. King into the kitchen, and William, who “misbehaved himself” and was asked to leave “when he awoke next morning.” Others found more lucrative employment. One of the most durable seems to have been an Irish couple named Annie and Thomas whom the Kings took with them to Toronto.

The rest of the Woodside retinue included chickens, a cow, some pigs, and a horse named Billy. It was his duty to pull the rig when the roads were good and to draw the sleigh in winter, but, contrary to his somnolent appearance in the photograph, he was given to bouts of friskiness, and would periodically run away into town by himself or would bolt with his charge, creating moments of great excitement for those in the rig. In 1888 the family also owned a dog named Fannie, but that year she was poisoned, a major tragedy for the King children. She was buried in the woods opposite the barn, and her grave marked with stones.

The restoration

The outbuildings of Woodside – the barn or stable, the chicken coop and the privy – as well as the servants’ quarters and the summer kitchen in the east wing of the house were not restored. Neither was the estate’s small apple orchard nor kitchen garden.

Woodside remained in the Colquhoun family’s possession until 1924, but it subsequently changed hands frequently, and Mackenzie King remarked, “. . . was allowed to go to rack and ruin. When I visited the old house some years later, it almost broke my heart to see it so neglected and in such a state of disrepair.” In 1944 the property was secured on a trust basis by the North Waterloo Liberal Association, and in 1950 The Mackenzie King Woodside Trust was incorporated. It undertook to restore the building and grounds to the conditions Mackenzie King had known as a boy.

In order to do this, the crumbling brick structure had to be demolished. It was rebuilt with a new foundation, using as much of the original materials as possible. A full-sized basement also had to be installed to provide for

modern heating facilities and visitor washrooms. In the early phases of the restoration, the architects were able to consult Mackenzie King and to be guided by his recollections.

The house was rebuilt by 1952, and several pieces of furniture and other objects that belonged to the King family during their Woodside occupancy were retrieved from two of Mackenzie King’s later residences, Laurier House in Ottawa and “Kingsmere,” Quebec, and from his sister Jennie (Mrs. H. M. Lay). In 1954 the property was deeded to the Government of Canada, to be administered by the National Historic Sites Division. Between 1961 and 1962 the house was completely refurbished. More than a half-century after the Kings lived at Woodside, it was impossible to locate all of the articles, of whatever sort, that actually belonged to them in the early 1890s. The furnishings now in Woodside that are not authenticated as the Kings’ belongings nevertheless convey the atmosphere of Mackenzie King’s boyhood home, and are intended to be consistent with the general taste of upper-middle class people in a small Ontario town of that period.



Indian and Northern Affairs Affaires indiennes et du Nord

Parks Canada Parcs Canada

Published by Parks Canada
under authority of the
Hon. J. Hugh Faulkner
Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs,
Ottawa, 1977
QS-C014-000-BB-A2

© Minister of Supply and Services
Canada 1977
Catalogue No. R64-80/1976

Kitchener-Waterloo

