

THE FAMILY OF HENRY CORBY  
BROTHER OF THOMAS CORBY WHO WAS MY GRANDFATHER

By Wesley Stanger Sr.

Henry Corby, son of James and Ann Corby, was born in Hanwell, Middlesex County, England on December 17, 1806 and baptized in the Established Church there. Like his grandfather, father and brother, Thomas (my grandfather) was a baker.

In 1828 he married Jemima Williams, daughter of Cornelius and Rosette Williams, who was born March 7, 1807 at Stepney, London, England. Shortly after their marriage they left England and took up residence in Quebec, Canada. In about 1830 he was on a steamboat with his wife which was delivering supplies to frontier settlements along the shores of Lake Ontario, when they stopped at a little settlement at a point where the Moira River empties into the Bay of Quinte, known as Belleville. Both were so entranced with the beauty of the location and the apparent opportunities that they decided to go no further. With very scant capital they opened a general store, grocery, and bakery. In 1838 he sold the general store and grocery and extended the bakery. Two days after Christmas of that year, his wife and three children drowned while riding in a sleigh, which went through the ice in the Bay of Quinte at a place known as Massasauga Point. He later bought the point, turning it into a public park in memory of the tragedy. In 1837 he joined the Canadian Army as a volunteer at the time of the Rebellion. He was a large and robust man over six feet tall. At the conclusion of the trouble, he sold the bakery and bought a steam boat named "Queen" of which he was captain, and which plied between Kingston, Belleville and other lake ports. In the interim he had begun to accumulate considerable property. He later sold the steamer and engaged in the grain business in Belleville, establishing a mill for cracking grain for the farmers founding the town of Corbyville, just outside of Belleville. He became very active in local affairs, was captain of the volunteer fire department, president of St. George's Society and Mayor of Belleville. When the British North American Act was promulgated by the British Crown he was elected to membership from Ontario in the first Canadian Parliament, where he served for several years.

Whiskey at that time was used as money. He installed a small still in the mill. While it was necessary to register a still under permit, there was no tax on alcohol. Each registered still was a sort of "mint". From a few bottles now and then it grew until at the present time it is rated as one of the largest alcohol producing plants in the British Empire. During this period he married Matilda Williams a younger sister of his first wife. This marriage gave him five sons and seven daughters, one of which died in infancy. He built a large house in Belleville, surrounded by several acres which he named Hanwell Cottage in memory of his boyhood home in England. Both he and Matilda were flower lovers and maintained large flower gardens from which they supplied the churches and townspeople with flowers for funerals (gratis) and other affairs. They also developed a truck farm<sup>1</sup> on the acreage, principally for the benefit of indigent families who were supplied, gratis, upon application to his gardener.

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<sup>1</sup> 2024 note by Scott Johnston: Truck farming is a type of small-scale commercial agriculture that involves growing and transporting fresh fruits and vegetables to urban markets. It originated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the United States and spread to other countries.

As the children grew up, like many English families of the day, they left for various parts of the British Kingdom. One son went to Vancouver and spent much of his life as an officer in the Canadian Army. One went to Maghera Ireland where he became a very successful merchant. One of the sisters also went there and married a Scotsman named Thompson, who was the grandfather of Henry Corby Thompson and his sister Ida who lived and died in Belleville. A son of theirs returned to Belleville, married, and was the father of Henry and Ida. James, another brother, went to Chicago where he married and was very successful in business. He had one son. Both he and his mother died in Chicago, the father surviving them by a few years. James often visited us in Evanston. He was a big man, six foot tall and quite a dandy; good natured and popular. One of the girls, Fanny, married a woolen manufacturer named Clark. They lived in Dundas Ontario and had several children, one of the boys having been a Captain in the Canadian Forces in the Boer War. The remaining daughters married Canadians, living in Belleville, Montreal, Toronto, and Quebec. Mrs. Fanny Clark was a favorite of my mother and was close to her age. I took my mother to Dundas where we visited the Clark family. At this time Mrs. Clark was a widow. She afterwards made two or three trips to Evanston and spent considerable time with my mother. She died sometime before my mother.

Henry Corby Thompson and his sister never married and lived in the red brick house erected by Henry Corby at 128 Bridge Street in Belleville. In 1950 Mrs. Stanger and I visited them at their home which was a short distance from where Alice Corby, also a spinster, resided. We were unable to see Alice Corby as she was very old and very ill at the time and unable to see anyone. She was the sister of Harry Corby.

Henry Corby's wife died when he was in his late sixties. He married the third time when he was over 70. His third wife was a Mrs. Metcalf, a widow who resided in Kingston and who died shortly after. During her lifetime she continued the flower garden and truck patch and practiced considerable philanthropy. After their demise Hanwell Cottage was demolished and the plot broken up into city lots. At his death he was rated as leaving an estate of over a million dollars and was said to be one of the wealthiest men in the Dominion.

The second son of the second wife of Henry Corby was "Henry the Younger" always known as "Harry". He remained in Belleville, was educated in Canada, followed the footsteps of his father, was elected to Parliament, and later named a Senator of the Dominion. He was my mother's cousin.

Harry had been close to his father and greatly interested in the business and was designated by his father to succeed him. All members of the family were firmly established in business and an agreement was reached between all of their heirs to consolidate the Corby interests in Harry's hands, permitting him to buy each one's share. The youngest of the family was a youth, too young to take any responsibility for the business, was retained by Harry as an employee, whose share was purchased by his older brother in accordance with the family agreement.

Harry was very open handed in both charities and public improvements. He established and endowed the Corby Free Public Library, built a bridge across the bay in two spans, which until recent years was the largest single span bridge in Ontario. He built the Hotel Quinte and rebuilt the Dafoe House which burned. It burned the second time and he again rebuilt it, afterwards selling it. He founded the Belleville Yacht Club, Belleville Cycle Club and the Belleville Cricket Club, all of which were later combined in the Belleville Club. He established a set of Public Baths in Victoria Park, improved and endowed Massasauga Point Park and was one of the principal backers of the Belleville Hospital, established the Corby Christmas Fund, also endowed, and was a principal supporter of St. Thomas'

Anglican Church. He was elected to Parliament in 1888, was named a Senator of the Dominion for life, which is not an elective office but which is conferred on citizens in appreciation of extraordinary service to the Dominion. He was invited to the coronation of George V, where he was received at court. He was married to Maria Courtney in 1872 and had three daughters. In 1905 he sold the mill and distillery for well over a million dollars. In 1907 it was visited by a disastrous fire but was rebuilt. It ceased making whiskey during the terms of both the first and second World Wars, being devoted exclusively to the production of alcohol for defense. He died in 1917 while on a tour of the Hawaiian Islands and is buried with other members of the Corby family in Belleville. He was rated as one of Canada's wealthiest men.

Henry Corby had three daughters. Mrs. Charles Laidlaw wife of a Toronto banker. Mrs. F.C.T. O'Hare of Ottawa whose husband was Deputy Minister of Trade and Commerce of the Dominion (similar to Secretary of Commerce in the USA). His other daughter was Alice Corby who never married but who carried on extensive charity and welfare work in Belleville until her death in 1952.

A letter to me from Henry Corby Thompson, dated September 3, 1849 says "Uncle Jim says the Thompson went from Scotland to Ireland which indicates that whichever of Henry Corby's daughters went there from Belleville where her brother was living, married a Thompson" – who was not a native, but a temporary resident, and thus became the grandparents of Henry Corby Thompson and his sister Ida. He continues further "The Corby's did not miss being Scotch by very many miles. There are many Corbys in Northumberland County in England which is just a bit south of Berwick on Scotland's border. (Northumberland County adjoins Lothian County (Scotland) in which Linlithgow is located to which place I traced the Corby's (Corbies). "The Scot Corbies probably derived their spelling from the Corbys. They seem to like that ie ending, as for instance "lassie", "laddie" and "wifie". What I think is that our folks were a bit lax in failing to acquaint us with our background." This connects very well with what I found regarding the early Corbys, emigrating from France to England and Scotland. This also bears out to some extent what I discovered and which is referred to in the story of my mother and her family.

The town of Corby was a very small place with a population of under 200 for several centuries. The discovery of iron ore in profitable quantities in recent times has attracted a large number of Scandinavians, Welsh and others. Today the town is no longer a settlement but a prosperous city due to the iron works. The offspring of the earliest settlers have died off and no accurate history of them has been preserved. The town itself boasts a crest, but it is distinctly French rather than English. Its adoption by the town is probably of recent times. The authentic English crest of the Corbys is as recorded in Burke's Armory in London, England. A copy of which accompanies this family history.

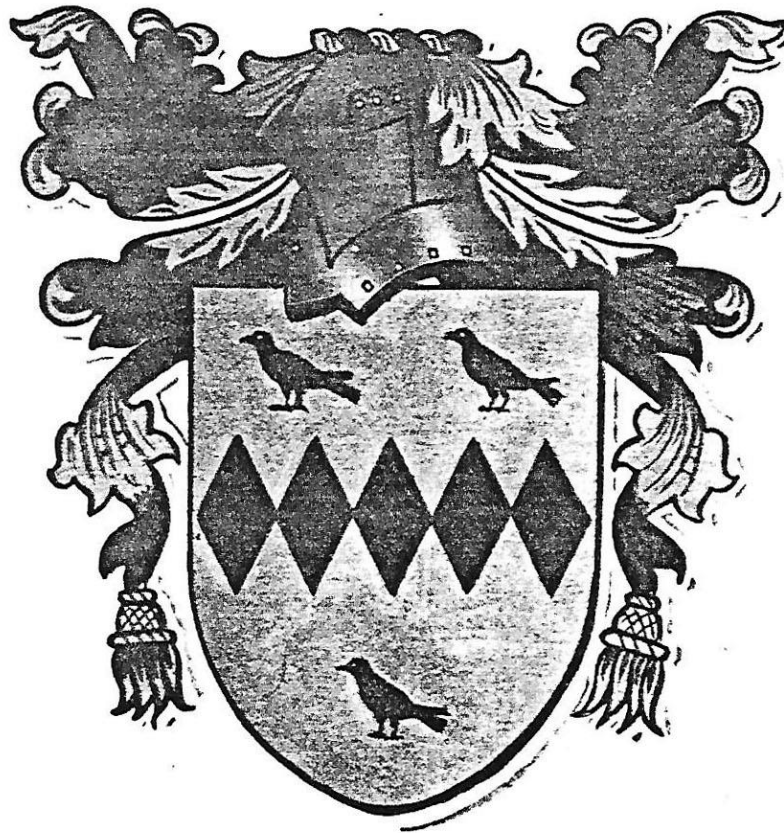
The crest adopted by the town of Corby retains a single emblem which identifies it with the family – the raven which surmounts the helmet. The name "Corby" is the designation of a raven or crow. The balance of the insignia is French as the shield is inscribed with the French Cross of the Crusaders and with the crown of Normandy in each of the four corners. A ribbon below the shield bears the inscription "Deeds not Words" in English. This is unusual for English crests, as the name of the family is usually inscribed there. Sometimes on English crests a separate designation or ribbon may be found, but it is detached from the general design and wherever one appears it is in Latin. This crest may have been found in France (or one similar) and used by the town. The use of the Norman crown and the French Crusader's cross identifies it with the period and the inclusion of the Raven indicates the relation of the English Corbys to it, but it is not the true crest of the Corby's of England. However, it also helps to authenticate the emigration of the Corbys from France during the Crusades to England and Scotland.

C O R B Y

Arms: Argent (silver) Five fusils in fesse, gules (red)  
between three ravens (crows) ppr.

Knight's Helmet: Mantling Argent and gules

Registered in Burke's Armory of England & Ireland



Corby