



"PRESERVING THE PAST FOR THE FUTURE"

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October 24, 2017

Heritage Barrie,  
c/o Joanne Werth,  
City Hall, Collier St.,  
Barrie ON.

Dear Ms. Werth,

Would you please place the following matter on the agenda for the next meeting of Heritage Barrie on November 7, 2017.

In 2014 Heritage Barrie generously contributed to the restoration of the large oil portrait of Sir James Gowan, the first judge of Simcoe County, which presently hangs in the Barrie courthouse. In further recognition of the historical significance of Judge Gowan, the Barrie Historical Association, in conjunction with the Simcoe County Historical Association, has arranged with Ontario Heritage Trust for the installation of one of their large, blue metal plaques in Kempenfelt Park during the summer of 2018.

Kempenfelt Park was originally part of Gowan's seven acre estate of Ardraven that was granted to him when he took up his appointment in 1843. The property, located between Duckworth Street and St. Vincent Park, extended from Blake Street to the waterfront. When Gowan died in 1909 that portion of the estate on the water side of Kempenfelt Drive was donated to the town of Barrie for use as a public amenity. It is, therefore, a suitable place for a plaque honouring one of Barrie's illustrious sons.

The unveiling will be a celebratory occasion with The Honourable Elizabeth Dowdesell, lieutenant-governor of Ontario, Chief Justice George Strathy, members of the legal community and local and county officials in attendance.

In order to complete this project we need to raise \$5,000 or 25% of the cost. I am confident that our application to the Simcoe County Cultural Grants program will raise half of this or \$2,500. We are applying to the Simcoe County Law Association and private donors for the remaining \$2,500.

However, we are also appealing to Heritage Barrie for any help you could give as we feel it is important for the City of Barrie to be part of a project that will recognize this important aspect of our rich local history.

Yours Sincerely,

Mark W. Fisher,  
President,  
Barrie Historical Association

THE HONOURABLE SIR JAMES ROBERT GOWAN

KCMG QC LLD

Appointed in 1843, James Robert Gowan (1815-1909) became the first judge for the newly-created Simcoe District and the youngest judge ever appointed in the British Empire. Until his retirement in 1883, Judge Gowan capably presided over the civil and criminal courts throughout a wide geographical area. During this time, as a valued adviser to Robert Baldwin, John A. Macdonald, Oliver Mowat and other leading politicians, Judge Gowan played a major part in the development of the judicial system of early Ontario and Canada. He was instrumental in the establishment of efficient rules for the Division Courts, the Crown Prosecutor system, several statute consolidations and the Upper Canada Law Journal, a publication that eventually became the Canadian Bar Review.

Judge Gowan also served for many years as the chairman of the Board of County Judges where he continued to advocate for judicial reforms, such as the fusion of civil law and equity courts and the consolidation of the criminal law. In 1865 he arbitrated the dispute between the contractors and the government over the building of the new parliament buildings in Ottawa and, in 1873, he acted as one of the three judges that investigated the charges against the government regarding the contract for a Canadian Pacific railway.

Appointed to the Senate in 1885, Gowan acted as the chairman of the standing committee that established rules and regulations concerning matrimonial divorce, many of which remained in force until 1968. As a final contribution, Gowan advocated strongly for the codification of the criminal law that was accomplished in 1892. Awarded a knighthood in 1905, The Honourable Sir James Robert Gowan died in 1909, at the age of 94, as one of the most illustrious citizens of Barrie and Simcoe County