

Ben Lett... Patriot or Rebel ?

by Charles Taws

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Many of us are under the false impression that the early pioneers led a harsh but monotonous existence, but they were subject to the same highs and lows as we are. Their lives could be affected by bad and good economic times, bad weather (such as the summerless year of 1816) and political unrest (such as the War of 1812 and the Rebellion of 1837).

This year on June the 9th Clarington holds its third Door's Open event. One of the sites is a small dilapidated frame house north of Solina whose story goes back to the tempestuous days of the 1837 Rebellion and one of its most notable characters Ben Lett. Lett is well known to history professors and students but few realize that he came from Clarington! To some he is a Canadian patriot, to others he is a detested rebel. To understand his story we must look at the Rebellion of 1837. The Rebellion occurred in both Upper Canada (present day Ontario) and Lower Canada (present day Quebec). This article is restricted to Ben Lett's activities in Upper Canada.

In 1837 the colony of Upper Canada was governed by a few wealthy families. They were known as the Family Compact and they ruled unfairly and arbitrarily. There was no representation for the people in government and this fueled unrest. Many people favoured moderate reform but some, such as William Lyon Mackenzie in Toronto, advocated revolutionary



A current picture of the Lett House taken for the 2012 Clarington Door's Open Walking Tour event on Saturday, June 9th.

views. Mackenzie wanted to establish Canada as a republic like the United States. He had set up a provisional government on Navy Island in the Niagara River. His base was supplied by a steamship called the Caroline until British troops snuck onto the island (which was American territory) and sent the steamer burning over Niagara Falls. The Rebellion was not a success and in its aftermath anyone even suspected of the slightest reform sympathies was suspect. It was under these circumstances that Ben Lett's story unfolded.

Samuel and Elizabeth Lett came with their children (Robert, Thomas, Ben, Elizabeth, Anne) to Canada from Ireland in 1819. At first they settled in Quebec on the Ottawa River where they had two more daughters Maria and Sara. The Letts farmed and did logging and rafting on the river. Samuel died in an accident in September of 1824. Nine years later they settled in Darlington Town-

ship. They were considered respectable people with an appreciation for education. After Ben's activities during the Rebellion they re-located to Texas. Ben didn't take part in the actual Rebellion but became involved when a man being pursued by agents of the Family Compact passed through the area. As J.B. Fairbairn wrote,

"It would seem that after the battle of Montgomery's Tavern, [on Yonge Street] Toronto, a refugee came down through Darlington. He looked and acted like a gentleman, one who had occupied a good position in life but presenting the appearance of a hunted deer, without boots and only partly clothed. Ben took him under his protection. They went east and caught the Kingston stage and finally ended up in the United States. Ben turned up at Navy Island."

Ben Lett enthusiastically joined the radical reformers as his subsequent actions tell. Beginning in November of 1838 he began a four year

crime spree. Here is a list of what he was accused of:

-Murder of Captain Edgeworth Ussher of Niagara. He had helped lead the British Troops to Navy Island where they burned the steamer Caroline.

-Unsuccessful attempt to burn British ships at Kings-ton Harbour.

-Led an unsuccessful American raid on Cobourg to capture, kill and rob government officials and others involved with the burning of the Caroline.

-Ben's most notable act was the "blowing up" of the original Brock's Monument at Queenston (April 17th 1840).

-Unsuccessful attempt to burn the steamer Great Britain in Oswego Harbour.

-Successfully bombed lock #37 (Allanburg) on the old Welland Canal.

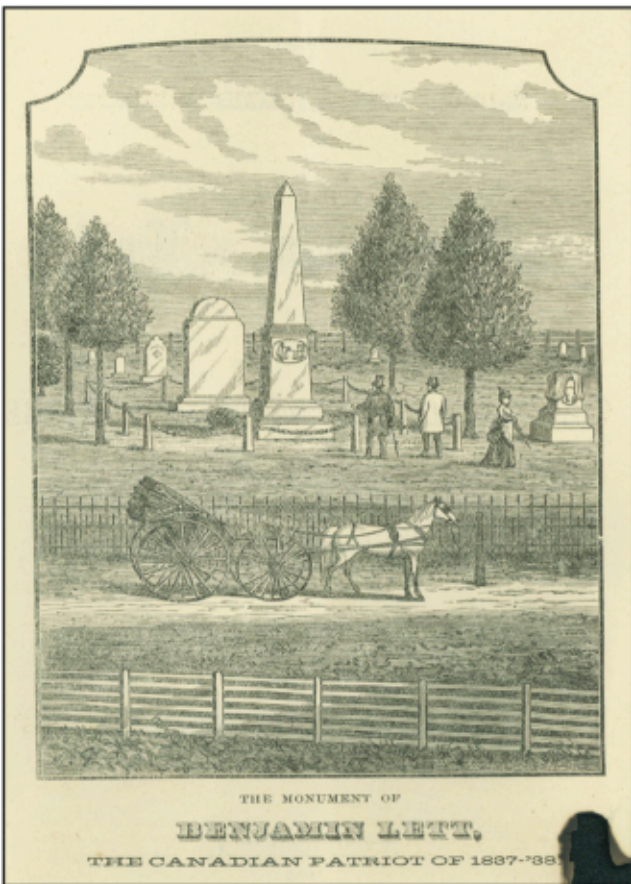
It should be noted that it is not clear if Ben is responsible for all of these acts. His reputation became such that any terrorist deeds became attributed to him ei-

Patriot or Rebel?

Continued from Page 1

ther by the public who saw him as a romantic Rob Roy

or Robin Hood figure or by the Family Compact who were eager to discredit him. Some notable Clarington



1876 image of the Benjamin Lett monument in the Lett Cemetery in Northville (near Sandwich), Illinois.

connections can be found in Ben's list. A Captain Samuel Ussher had an early mill just east of Bowmanville and he is believed to have been a brother or cousin of the murdered Captain Edgeworth Ussher of Niagara. Another local connection is through Robert Armour, a lawyer and the Registrar of West Durham who lived in Bowmanville from 1857 until his death in 1890. As a young man he was one of the soldiers who participated in the Caroline affair.

Stories of Ben Lett in the Clarington area abounded. Mr. John Frank, whose stone house still stands near the Visual Arts Centre, claimed of finding Ben asleep in one of his cornfields. He took him prisoner but gave him some food and set him free. Henry Powers in Kirby claimed to have sheltered Ben Lett and Samuel Lount shortly after the battle of Montgomery's Tavern. "They spent the night under Power's hospitable roof, had supper and breakfast and started in the grey of the early morning through the woods to the east, and soon were lost to sight."

Historic sources prove that the other man could not have been Samuel Lount but it may have been the un-named gentleman mentioned by J.B. Fairbairn. It is on one of these flights that local legend states that Ben stopped at his family home. He was hidden in the basement while the authorities searched the premises. The trap door that Ben used is still visible today in the old Lett house.

Ben Lett had a price on his head and was the number one topic of conversation. While many people may have been sympathetic, many more wanted to see him captured. Daniel Conant had his own experiences during the 1837 Rebellion. They vividly describe the desperate situation of the times. The Conants were one of Clarington's founding families, but being on the western border became associated with Oshawa. Daniel was the grandson of Roger the original settler. By 1837 he was a prosperous businessman. He had a sailing ship called the Industry which he used for trade.



The Industry, a 100 foot long wooden schooner owned by Daniel Conant, was lost while ferrying patriots to the United States in the winter. The patriots were forced to walk the last part of the journey on the unsafe and shifting ice.

The entreaties of the many respectable people being unfairly persecuted by the Family Compact convinced him to take his ship out in winter to ferry them to the United States and safety.

"On the night of the 27th day of December, 1837, the little vessel of 100 feet in length quietly slipped from her moorings, and sailed close along the shore of Lake Ontario. It was a bright moonlight night, still, but very cold. Every mile or so she would back her mainsail, and lay to at a signal of a light upon the shore, that a canoe might put off to the vessel, bearing a patriot from his hiding in the forest to the side of the boat."

The ship made it across the lake safely, but the people were forced to endure the elements and walk on the ice towards the American shore. It was a harrowing experience and the ship was ultimately lost. Daniel and his crew crept back across the border in the spring of 1838. The Conants had their own problems with the Family Compact. A government messenger killed Daniel's father, Thomas, as he walked along Highway # 2 just east of Courtice on February 15th 1838. The murderer was never brought to justice.

Continued on Page 3

Ben Lett... Patriot or Rebel ?

Continued from Page 2

In the end the radical reformers did not accomplish their goal of responsible government. Some were hanged, but most were sent to the prison colonies in Australia where many died. Although Ben had escaped to the United States he had a price on his head there too. The Governor of New York, William Seward (the man who later arranged the



The assassination of Thomas Conant just west of Courtice occurred when he was walking to Bowmanville along Highway # 2. The Military Messenger was drunk and Thomas wasn't afraid to tell him so. He paid with his life and the murderer, protected by the Family Compact, was never brought to justice.

United States purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867 for 7.2 million dollars) offered a reward of \$250.00 for his capture. In Canada the amount reached 500 pounds! He was captured in the United States, escaped and was captured again and finally imprisoned at Auburn, N.Y. He was mistreated and in 1845 with his health broken he was pardoned. For a number of years Ben led a quiet life with his family in Illinois. In 1858 he again made the news for blowing up a newly completed schoolhouse in Earlville, Illinois. He had been hired by a crooked saloon owner by the name of Jonathan Reed. The town had destroyed his still because its alcoholic product was so potent it was actually killing people. In revenge Reed hired Ben to blow up the school. Shortly after this event, Ben Lett was poisoned with strychnine on a business trip to Milwaukee and died. He is buried in the family cemetery in Northville, Illinois. No likeness of Ben has been found but a contemporary account described him as being, "5 ft 11 inches high, rather slim, sandy hair and whiskers, very red faced with freckled, light skinned, very large muscular hands, with round long and white fingers. Eyes light blue, and remarkably penetrating."

The Lett family was very fond of their brother and thought he was either unduly influenced or betrayed by other people. His brother, Thomas, defended him until the end. In

1876 he published a booklet about his brother's life and he erected a monument to him in the family cemetery. On it are these curious words, "THE RECORDS OF AMERICAN PARTNERSHIP IN THE CASE OF BENJAMIN LETT—THEY ARE LIKE A CHRISTSIAN HELL WITHOUT JESUS CHRIST: NO ESCAPE". Many years later, in 1883, Ben's sister Sara wrote the Postmaster in Bowmanville inquiring about the many people they left behind when they fled Darlington in 1839. "Sir, it is just forty-four years ago today since I left my home in Darlington...my early recollections are of its woods and winding streams." Her letter mentions many early families- Millsons, Whites, Licks, Wilburs, Smiths and Sloans. After the family left Canada they settled in Nacogdoches, Texas, then Natchitoches Louisiana (sister cities). It was here that their Mother and sister Anne died of yellow fever. Thomas and the rest of the family moved to Illinois. There Sara met and married William Cottew in 1853. She died in 1887. Her sister, Maria, was the last surviving sibling and died in 1900.

The Lett farm in Darlington was sold to the Millsons who own it to this day. It is thanks to them that the Lett house is still standing today. The advertisement describ-



After the Rebellion of 1837 anyone associated with the reformers ran the risk of imprisonment, hanging or being taken to an Australian penal colony. One man was so desperate to get away that he stole a pine dug out canoe and paddled himself across to the American shore. He left the Canadian side at 10:00pm and arrived the next day at 4:00pm. This feat was all together more remarkable by the fact that he had to keep the stern of the canoe weighted so the bow, which had rotted away, stayed out of the water.

ing the property in 1839 read, "Darlington, lot 27, concession 7, consisting of 200 acres, of which 60 were cleared and ten under fall wheat. There is a frame house, a log barn and excellent water on the place." Responsible Government did come in the 1840's but only under the guidance of more moderate reformers such as Robert Baldwin and Louis Hippolyte-LaFontaine. The Baldwins, a well known Toronto family, had originally settled in Newcastle, but that is another story.

Fortunate to live in this Community



by **Jim Abernethy**, Editor

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Each summer, Clarington has much to offer in the way of community events.

If you are new to our community, I encourage you to get out and attend some of these events and meet some new friends.

June 8, 9 & 10 is Rockin' Rotary Ribfest. The Garnet B. Rickard Centre will be rockin' with the sounds of George Thorogood & CCR Tribute Bands.

Want a deal on some ribs? See the details on page 4 of this edition where you will find a \$3.00 off coupon – GOOD ONLY ON FRIDAY 12-5PM – Enjoy!

You still have lots of time to buy your rubber duck for the 17th Annual Duck Derby (down Bowmanville Creek) sponsored by the Lions Club of Bowmanville. (see ad on this page) Now there is an event that is fun for the whole family and a chance to win some major prizes. Contact a Lion to purchase your ticket.

Two very interesting events you won't want to miss are the Ontario Heritage Trust - Doors Open tour event on June 9th and the RCMP Musical Ride on June 14th. Contact in-

formation and details for both of these events can be found in the May edition of the Clarington Promoter. Lost your copy? No problem, go online to www.claringtonpromoter.ca where you will find all past issues nicely archive and waiting for you to read.

The Bryan Bickell Golf Tournament returns on Friday July 6, 2012 at the Black Diamond Golf & Country Club located off Hwy 115 just outside of Pontypool. This is your opportunity to get close to some of the great NHL Players who return each year in support of Bryan's fund raiser. Personally I have never seen prize tables (12) as extensive as the one at last year's event. If you would like to play in this golf tournament, buy tickets for a super prize or help sponsor the event please contact Chad Maartense. Just a heads up..... these tickets go fast! Contact Chad 905-260-7291 or pcmaartense@rogers.com

In closing I would like to extend my personal gratitude to the Valleys2000 Board of Director, the various Committee Members, volunteers and everyone who gave their financial support or their time and expertise to help achieve the goal of raising \$450, 000 for the Fish By-pass Project. This was truly a project that the entire community got behind. We are a better community for it, and our children will reap the benefits of our combined efforts for generations to come. Thanks very much.

Increase the Average Sale Value



by Peter Hobb

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In my two previous articles I have written about two ways to grow your business. The third way is to adopt strategies to increase the average value of each sale. To calculate the average value of each sale you simply divide total sales by the number of customers who made those purchases over a given period. You want to make sure that when a customer makes a purchase that you have

maximized the potential sale value and you have fully met that customer's needs. A small increase in average sale value, when multiplied by the number of customers you have, can dramatically improve profitability.

Most of us are familiar with cross selling where you offer your customer some other product or service that would complement their original choice. McDonald's has made cross selling famous. "Would you like fries with your Big Mac!" Cross selling is ingrained in their culture. To incorporate cross selling into your sales system you can start by looking at your major product or service offerings and then identify other items or services that you could offer to add value and help the customer get the most out of the purchase. You can then develop cross selling checklists for each

major product or service that can be used by team members to make suggestions to customers. Remember it is not just about maximizing the sale value. You want to make sure that you have met all your customer's needs. If you don't you could drive them to your competitor.

A second strategy is commonly referred to as up selling. "Do you want me to super size those fries". Offer products in three or more categories. For example you can offer your products or services in three categories "Gold, Silver and Bronze". Statistics show that most customers will select the second tier item when presented with these options. The idea is to encourage customers to purchase higher priced items that generate more profit. Also by having more than one category you allow customers to select a

product or service that aligns with their personal buying preferences. For example the first category will appeal to those customers that are more price conscious while the top category will appeal to those customers willing to pay more to get better value.

Bundling products or services is another technique used for increasing the average sale value. This technique is designed to make your products or services more attractive and create a higher perceived value. The customer feels they are receiving more relative to the dollars spent. An example of bundling would be to offer free installation with the purchase of your product. This can be done as an alternative to discounting the item to encourage sales increasing the average sales value.

How you merchandise your product or service can

also increase average sale value. Point-of-sale displays are one example of smart merchandising. Grocery stores are very good at this. They make their check out displays very accessible to young children. It is difficult for parents with young children to get through the check out without adding candy to their purchases or face creating a scene. Other examples include signage, presentation and packaging, or telephone recordings telling customers about other products or services.

You need to understand the gross margin that each product or service contributes to your business. This is important so that you can assess the potential impact on your bottom line if you discount prices or increase prices. We normally caution our clients against discounting as it can have a very neg-

ative impact on their bottom line. For example, if you have a product that generates a 35% gross margin and you reduce the price of that item by 10%, you must increase your sales volume by 40% to achieve the same profit. Not likely to happen. On the other hand if you increase prices by 10% your sales can drop by 22% and you would still achieve the same profit. In this latter case it is probably unlikely that your sales would drop by that amount increasing profitability. Statistics show that only 15% of the market actually purchase on the basis of price alone.

In an earlier article I wrote about the importance of having a sales system. The strategies you teach your team when developing your sales system should incorporate some of the strategies described in this article.