

Old Ladies Home Fund Helps all Ages

by Jane Barry

The Greater Saint John Community Foundation

On occasions when mention is made of The Old Ladies Home, eyes may roll at the quaint term but it is in fact, the legal and official name of a former residence for elderly women and now their legacy which lives on, helping people in our community of all ages. From 1919-1977, Broad St, in Saint John's South End was the location of a stately brick building which was also known as Courtenay House. It did not have any known affiliation with a church or service club and originated in 1870, when a group of civic leaders proposed "The Home for Aged Females of Saint John", another title which today might raise eyebrows. It was located on Germain St. until being destroyed by The Great Fire of 1877. Graeme Somerville, a benefactor of the Greater Saint John Community Foundation, and his brother, Dr. Malcolm Somerville, have generously provided historical research into the homes. Their mother was a resident in the 1970's.

Murray Driscoll, former Board Chair of The Church Home of St. John and St. Stephen recalls attending religious services there with his father, a Salvation Army member, when he was a boy, more than fifty years ago. It was not a nursing home, as we know it today, but rather a spacious residence complete with a graceful staircase and drawing room. Residents took their meals at small tables and had their own separate bedrooms. The building did not have an elevator to the second floor, so some mobility on the part of the residents was required. A "matron" supervised day to day operations.

Many of the approximately twenty ladies living there were unmarried and had no close relatives to provide for their care. For that reason, they were generous to the Home and many made bequests to it on their passing. A fund accumulated and was used to help operate the Home and provide for its residents. A board existed at the Home, which helped oversee this as well as ensuring volunteers and meeting other needs of the resident ladies. Some of the community volunteers who served on this Board and later, an Advisory Committee, include: Dr. John Bewick, George Clark Q.C., Dr. Leroy Creamer, (Chair), Robert Creamer, (Chair), Mrs. Joanna Filliter, Dr. Leonard Higgins (Chair), Mrs. Lois MacDonald, G. Andrew Oulton, Mrs. Ann Pike, Mrs. Joyce Pridham, Edith Rosenow, Mrs. Jamesie Stead, Mrs. Sally Taylor, Mrs. Janice Waldschutz (Chair),

As social conditions changed, people's life expectancy increased and the needs of the elderly became greater. Several new nursing homes were in the planning stages, including Loch Lomond Villa and The Church Home of St. John and St. Stephen. It was determined a move would be made to close The Old Ladies Home and transfer residents to The Church Home of St. John and St. Stephen in Millidgeville and other similar facilities. Some of the beautiful antique furnishings in the parlour of The Church Home of St. John and St. Stephen came from Courtenay House/The Old Ladies Home.

An application to the courts was made by the late Deno Pappas Q.C. on behalf of The Old Ladies Home to transfer the funds (approximately \$753,000) to The Saint John Foundation. The matter of was settled by Judge Stuart Stratton with an order in 1979 to make a gift of \$120,000 to the new Church Home of St. John and St. Stephen and establish a six member Advisory Committee to recommend on the disposition of the earnings from the newly formed Old Ladies Home of Saint John Fund, which would be placed in the trusteeship of The Saint John Foundation, now known as The Greater Saint John Community Foundation. "To provide for aged and needy men and women" was the stated purpose of the fund and it has been doing so annually since inception. In 2005, members of the committee, wishing to uphold that purpose, took additional steps to ensure it continues to benefit seniors in perpetuity by providing for two annual post-secondary bursaries in seniors-related fields of study and also to charitable community seniors' causes from earnings on the endowment.

Last Friday, Nov. 27, two New Brunswick Community College students, Amy Langille and April Torrie, were each awarded a \$2,000 scholarship from the Old Ladies Home Fund at their annual awards ceremony, where over \$110,000 from a wide range of generous supporters went to NBCC students. The annual Old Ladies Home Awards, in the field of Gerontology or a field, related to and positively impacting on, the quality of life of seniors, carry on the legacy for students in such programs as Practical Nurse, Health Care Aide, Home Support Worker and Human Services Worker.



Photo:
Amy Langille (pictured, right) and April Torrie, were each awarded a \$2,000 scholarship from the Greater Saint John Community Foundation's Old Ladies Home Fund at NBCC's annual awards ceremony last week by Janice Waldschutz, Foundation Board member, as new Principal, Diane Burt, looked on.



Community Profile is a weekly column highlighting community causes and work done by non-profit organizations in the Greater Saint John area. It is contributed by Jane Barry, executive director of The Greater Saint John Community Foundation. Contact the foundation at 506-672-8880. To view other Community Profiles go to www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca