

All That Remains - Featuring J.B. Snowball

By Charlotte Loggie, Miramichi Historical Society

There are many who have left their mark on Miramichi. They comprise a diverse population of women and men, from all walks of life. Some have had their stories told multiple times, some not enough. This series proposes to view the lives and legacies of three major families, whose “paterfamilias” or head, was each, in his own way, instrumental in moving Miramichi forward in development and achievement. The men portrayed here all lived during a similar arc of time, and all made remarkable accomplishments during their lives. However, as time rolls onward, it has taken with it much of each of their stories. Their names, familiar or not, and some physical reminders of their presence here are all that remains.

Jabez Bunting Snowball 1837-1907

In this issue we’ll explore the life of J.B. Snowball, as he was commonly known, the son of a Methodist preacher who emigrated from England in the early 19th century, married, and took on the life of a circuit rider, preaching Methodism at one rural location and riding many miles to the next. Mr. John Snowball senior and his wife Sarah Ann Wells had eight children, of whom J.B. was the fifth. When John Snowball arrived in Miramichi in 1852 to preach the gospel of Methodism, J.B. was 17 years old and was enrolled at the Wesleyan Academy in Sackville, NB. A few years later, J.B. moved to Chatham and entered into business with a well-known entrepreneur, John Macdougall. By 1866, Mr. Macdougall had died and J.B. took over the business and married Macdougall’s daughter Margaret. J.B. was now the sole proprietor of a large store located in downtown Chatham, known as **Macdougall and Snowball**.

J.B. and Margaret had 8 children but unfortunately, six of them died young. Margaret died in 1871 aged 36, and Snowball remarried in 1873 to Margaret Archibald. She and J.B. had four daughters and a son who lived to maturity.

Snowball’s entrepreneurial efforts were huge: he expanded the Macdougall Snowball store into a lumber export enterprise, building sawmills here in Chatham and the surrounding area. He cooperated with another magnate of the day Alexander “Boss” Gibson of Marysville to **build a connecting railroad** from Gibson’s mills to Chatham, and brought in electric lights and telephone service to Chatham. Snowball’s Chatham mill was the **largest steam sawmill in New Brunswick**, located where the Sewage Treatment plant is today in Chatham. The machine shop for this mill was located where LeGresley’s store in Chatham is.

In an interview with Mrs. Lois Martin who wrote extensively about Snowball, Dr. Don Moar remembered his uncle Peter Moar telling him that the ships would be lined up



J.B. and his second wife, Lady Snowball, held lavish fundraisers and garden parties at Wellington Villa on King Street in Chatham.

11 deep in the river, waiting to take lumber on board from the Snowball mill. “As soon as one ship was loaded, another one would move up” said Moar. It must have been an incredible sight. Many people in Chatham would have



The home of J.B.’s son, Robert Archibald Snowball was a showplace estate and property, and he established Miramichi Nurseries on the lot next door.

people in their families who might have worked for Snowball at one time. He was considered a fair employer, but remained opposed to organized labour, and this opposition cost him his bid for mayor in 1896.

However, Snowball kept his hand in politics. **Elected as an Independent MP** in 1878, he was **appointed Senator** in 1891, a position he resigned in order to become **Lieutenant-**

Governor of New Brunswick in 1902. J.B. Snowball died in Fredericton, walking to Christ Church Cathedral in February of 1907. He was 70 years old.

What Remains - The Snowball Homes

J.B. and his second wife entertained lavishly at their Chatham home named **Wellington Villa** which is still in existence, now numbered 35 King Street (originally 200 Wellington St.) It is a fine example of Gothic architecture, built before 1867. The wrought iron fence that still surrounds most of the property is believed to have come from England. When Snowball built his “villa” the property extended east as far as Queen Street and south as far as 43 King Street. Calvin Presbyterian church was originally the coach house for Wellington Villa. The second Mrs. Snowball was known as “Lady Snowball” for her generosity and enjoyment of garden parties and fundraisers held on her spacious grounds. These carried on even after J.B. 's death, as she raised money for the war effort (WW1) or for local charities and her church, St. Luke’s Methodist Church which was located on Wellington and McCurdy Streets in Chatham.

The Sunday School hall of St. Luke’s Methodist church is still present on McCurdy Street in Chatham, now the home of Chatham Legion #3. This Queen Anne Revival building has 4 towers with pyramid-shaped roofs on each one. The roof is “jerkin” style which means the roof has odd, irregular angles. Originally, this building housed 15 Sunday School classrooms and a main auditorium that could seat 600 people.



Sunnyside on Henderson street was the home of J.B.'s son, William Snowball and was once surrounded by extensive gardens.

Muirhead family in 1873 but due to bankruptcy, was sold to William Snowball in 1892. William Snowball was mayor of Chatham for two terms, and also served in the House of Commons as MP for a year. He was a founding member of the Miramichi Agricultural Exhibition. This Snowball house is Georgian in many features, but the central tower has Italianate influences. At one time, gardens stretched from Henderson St to King St with greenhouses and a gardener’s house (still in existence) at 53 Howard Street.

R.A Snowball House

J.B.’s son Robert Archibald Snowball (1875-1949) was a two-time mayor of Chatham and a keen horticulturist. His home was a showplace, located at the Southeast corner of King and Howard Streets in Chatham, featuring a manicured lawn, a fountain and a fish pond. He established Miramichi Nurseries (a forebear of Harvey White’s “Wayside Gardens” and was a founder of the Miramichi Agricultural Association.

The Snowball Monument (Riverside Cemetery)

This imposing monument strikes your eye as you enter the cemetery on Water Street. It almost resembles a wedding cake with its ornate top and filigree trim. Each panel lists various members of the Snowball family and their birth/death dates. It is particularly sad to see that J.B. 's first wife, Margaret Macdougall died at age 36 having had 6 of her children predecease her.



Snowball Street

The final marker of this iconic family is a small street that crosses over Nicol Ave and Winslow Street before turning into Flam Street in the Riverside Drive Subdivision. Many people who live in this area likely are unaware of the family it commemorates.



J.B Snowball bought the Henderson House for his son William as a wedding present.

The building also contained a bowling alley. The building remained the property of the United Church until it was sold to the Legion in the 1950s.

Henderson House (1st home of W.B. Snowball)

40 Henderson Street was built in 1881 for Frank Martin, a river pilot. J.B. Snowball bought the house in 1889 and gave it to his son William as a wedding present. The house is in “Picturesque” style with beautiful bargeboard trimming and one gothic hood mount window still present.

Sunnyside (later home of W.B. Snowball)

This home, at 65 Henderson Street was built for the