

WHEN LYON FELL BY WILSON'S HAND

Excerpted from '*The Hunter's Bride of Otty Lake*'
By Robert Jamieson (c1905)

Over four and one-half years, between January 1903 and July 1907, the *Perth Courier* published, in about 50 installments, an epic historical narrative poem of 6,046 lines and nearly 50,000 words entitled *The Hunter's Bride of Otty Lake*; a poem penned by local "historian, poet, litterateur"¹ Robert Jamieson (1848-1932).

*No more interesting character could have been found in this district than that of Mr. Jamieson His collection of poems would comprise a volume of four hundred pages and all of them have been published, though not in book form. His 'Witness of Pontiac' is a romance of the Upper Ottawa and 'Viola of St. Regis' is a verse story of the war of 1914-18 ... His longest poem, or rather story in verse [The Hunter's Bride of Otty Lake], has for its theme a romance arising out of the wars of 1812-14"*².

Departing from a preamble that begins at the end of the last ice age 12,000 years ago³, the main storyline of *Hunter's Bride* encompasses about 35 years from 1800 to 1835. The overall theme is the betrayal of North America's First Nations, as told through the adventures and wandering of Shawnee 'Chief Jacob', a close confederate of Tecumseh, who saves the life of Mathilda, a French girl (daughter of the Chief Trader), at the siege of Fort Wayne in 1812. Chief Jacob fights at the side of the British through the War of 1812 but when the Treaty of Ghent betrays promises of an Indian homeland he marries Mathilda, comes to Canada and settles among his comrades in arms on the shores of Otty Lake. Their only child, a daughter named Ouneta, is destined to be the '*Bride of Otty Lake*', but on her wedding day a jealous villain, Dark Shabot, ambushes her lover, the hunter Onieda, as he begins the last leg of his journey from Lake Superior - the portage from the Mississippi River near Fallbrook to Otty Lake. Ouneta, of course, dies shortly afterward of a broken heart.

In the latter parts of *The Hunter's Bride of Otty Lake* Jamieson recounts numerous incidents, and touches upon several of the leading personalities, of the early days of the Perth Military Settlement. One of these is the 'Last Fatal Duel' fought near Perth in 1833, to which he dedicates 192 lines. Fully exercising his license as a poet, Jamieson's presents a much-romanticized version of the event, and thus one riddled with errors of historic fact.

¹ *Perth Courier*, April 29, 1932.

² *Ibid.*

³ Jamieson had an interest in geology.

**Excerpt From
The Hunter's Bride of Otty Lake
By Robert Jamieson**

Then Jacob told of that sad fray
At Duel Point upon the Tay,
Where Lyon fell by Wilsons hand –
The latest duel in this land.
Close friends these two young men had
been
Somewhat of life they had each seen,
And much in common, late, they saw –
They both were students of the law.

Just then the good old Town of Perth
But deemed herself the best on earth,
And still has much of that same pride,
That bore her founders o'er the tide.
Her sires were men of martial deeds,
Imbued with war, and all her creed,
With Wellington, in his campaign,
They fought on all the fields of Spain.

And aged in all that arms could do,
They crowned their lives at Waterloo.
There, around, from their fields of fame,
These gallant warriors, resting, came,
And with them drew, that coterie gay,
The founders of Perth, old Perth-upon-Tay.

These students breathed the air of pride,
While each one with the other vied.
As daily each their course pursue,
Yet closer still their friendship grew.
At length an incident arose,
Commenced by words which grew to blows,
And parted two aspiring men,
No more to meet as friends again.

A lady fair was in the case,
Yet innocent of what took place.
Each student sought this lady's hand,
As well as one LaLievre, bland.
LaLievre knew his suit was vain,
And vowed dire vengeance on the twain,
Young Wilson was, as then he thought,
The barrier to the hand he sought.

The news of the encounter spread,
Each aiding something never said,
Until the tale was magnified,
And the LaLievre chose his side.
He urged the two in honor's name,
While fanning still the latent flame,
To end their quarrel on the field,
And to their honor much appealed.

Those were the days of martial pride,
When many in like duels died,
When followed close on angry words,
The pistols or the rapier swords.
A challenge from young Wilson came,
With weapons such as they should name,
While he preferred the rapier sword,
With pistols he would keep his word.

La Lievre knew young Lyon's skill,
And then advised him with a will,
To choose the pistols for the fray,
And fix at once the duel day.
One Robinson, young Wilson's friend,
Tried, in vain, the feud to end,
LaLievre's counsels touched their pride,
And made the breach both deep and wide.
No friendly voice could then avail,
Stern honor's code must still prevail.

Upon the eve of duel day,
Each rival took his custom'd way,
Each called upon the maiden fair,
To leave with her some trinket rare,
And say to her a last goodbye,
For on the morrow one must die,
The fair one knew not of the feud,
Nor yet had learned the gossip's _____.

And she, still innocent of all,
Gave each glad welcome on his call,
So well each veiled his secret thoughts,
No omen to the maid he brought,
And she but deemed each visit there,
As one of custom by the pair.
When Lyon left the lady's side,
He drew his watch, and chain _____.

Keep these he said, and keep your heart,
The best of friends must sometimes part.
Keep them until we meet again,
The reason then we will explain.
She laughing, said she'd guard well each,
And keep his heart, within her _____,
She little knew his heart of pain,
That they would never meet again.

Upon the thirteenth day of June,
As then we counted by the moon,
In birch canoe we wound our way,
Down Gibbs Creek, at dawn of day.
That was the year, now let us see,
It was eighteen and thirty-three.
Ere sunrise we had reached the Tay,
Then up that stream we held our way.
Against strong currents, now and then,
Until we heard the voice of men.

We changed our course, yet kept our way,
Until we reached a sedgy bay,
Then through the weeds we pushed to land,
To rest awhile our weary hand.
The morning sun beamed warm and bright,
The dew drops glistened in her light.
They hung like gems from leaves around,
They glittered o'er the grassy ground,

Like countless diamonds, rich and rare,
They shone and sparked everywhere.
The stream flowed on, a silent flood,
And nurtured there a leafy wood.
_____ on her breast,
They _____ like a child caressed,
They rose and fell with wavelet flow,
_____ far down below.

The wood was dressed in matchless green
Above the fragrant flowers seen
The song-birds there, in rich array
Still thrilled, in tune, their morning lay;
All nature then in beauty dressed,
There welcomed us, awhile to rest
The voices grew upon our ear,
Till soon five men, to us appear;

We know them well, by form and face,
Then close to our secluded place.
First Lyon with LaLievre came –
In converse, close, their course they frame,
Young Wilson next, with Robinson,
Then Reade the surgeon, followed on,
They halted in an open space,
Where we, unseen, could see each face,

We saw the pistols, then we knew,
And somewhat restless, there we grew,
That near us was the chosen spot,
Where soon a duel would be fought,
They viewed the sun and woods around,
Then traced a space upon the ground,
Which calmed our feelings, then grown
strange –
Our resting place was out of range.

The two young men, as in a dream,
Surveyed the wood, the sky, and stream,
While, all arrangements, in that glade,
Their seconds and the surgeon made,
There, back to back, the rivals stood,
Upon that space within that wood;
Then twenty paces each they made,
To North and Southward on the glade,

Each turned and stood, with ready hand,
Awaiting there, the last command:
Each took the pistol from his friend,
And spoke the message he would send.
The gleaming pistol each one raised,
As rooted there we stood amazed:
Ready! Fire! Reade, the surgeon cried,
One loud report to him replied,

And there unscathed the rivals stand,
With smoking weapons in their hand,
All seemed glad, except LaLievre.
That reckless, gay and arch deceiver:
His visage, as he stood apart,
Still spoke deep malice in his heart,
Young Robinson and Reade conferred,
And, with the rivals, peace preferred –

Young Lyon proffered the amende,
Which satisfied his former friend,
Load up again! LaLievre cried,
With sneers that touched the young men's
pride,
Load up! Until one draws the blood,
We may not quit this chosen wood,
LaLievre's sneering taunts prevailed,
Though much that course young Reade
assailed.

The seconds loaded, once again –
All further parley was in vain,
The leader in this wretched fray,
Would brook no longer with delay:

And soon each rival took his place,
With marked aversion on his face,
They stood as in a waking dream –
Each looked upon the wood and stream;

Each looked farewell to earth and sky,
Each turned to heaven and anxious eye –
The word rang out – one shock replied,
With burst of smoke from either side –
Young Lyon fell upon the sand,
With smoking pistol in his hand,
Each ran to raise him from the ground –
Each horror stricken stooped around –

No need of surgeon's aid or art –
Young Wilson's bullet pierced the heart,
No use to raise or rest his head –
Young Lyon on the spot fell dead.
They bore him from that field of blood,
By winding pathway through the wood –
A moss-grown stone, in graveyard near,
Now tells the fact, the day and year,
When Lyon fell by Wilson's hand –
The latest duel, in the land.

Jamieson's rhyming account of the 'Last Fatal Duel' represents the version of events preferred by romantics and one that has well served boosters of Perth tourism for more than 150 years. Nevertheless, for the sake of historic accuracy, several excesses and numerous errors of fact, should be noted.

Robert Lyon (1812-1833) and John Wilson (1807-1869) were not close friends and, while they were rivals in business (studying law under competing attorneys), they were not in competition for the hand of the "*lady fair*", Elizabeth Johanna Hughes (1812-1904). Lyon and Wilson did, however, get into an argument prompted by Lyon teasing Wilson about Hughes. Lyon punched Wilson in the nose, and his refusal to apologize left Wilson little choice but to issue a challenge if he was to maintain his tenuous grip on the status of 'gentleman'. The duel was about the bloody nose, not about Elizabeth Hughes.

That, on the night before the duel, Wilson and Lyon "*Each called upon the maiden fair, To leave with her some trinket rare*", is a complete fiction created by Jamieson.

Beyond the five men directly involved, all other witnesses to the actual duel were in and around a barn about 400 meters (440 yards) away. The fictional witness who narrates the poem, “*having wound our way down Gibbs Creek⁴ at dawn of day*”, was probably created by Jamieson based upon an account of the duel written by Perth *Courier* editor J. M. Walker in 1905⁵. That version included a passage reading,

... a party of three men ... paddling a canoe up the Tay River on their way to Perth, landed on the McLaren farm ... to rest and eat their breakfast ... they heard a shot and voices. Pushing through the underbrush ... they came to a clearing at the bank of the river ... just in time to see a second shot fired and one of the men there turn half round, throw up his arms and fall stone dead.

The witness in the poem recounts that “... *they halted in an open space [in a] wood dressed in matchless green [as] the morning sun beamed warm and bright*”. In reality the duel took place in a muddy farm field, at about 5:30 in the afternoon of an overcast and rainy day.

Jamieson’s poem incorrectly identifies Wilson’s second as “*Robinson*”; his second was actually Simon Fraser Robertson, another law student.

The poem names William Charles De Benyon Reade (1818-1839) as “*the surgeon*” associated with the duel. Reade did witness the duel, from a distance, but in 1833 he was only 15 years of age.⁶ The surgeon present, as required by the Dueling Code of 1777, was Dr. William Hamilton.

As every romantic tragedy requires a villain, the creators of the ‘Last Duel’ legend, as accepted and contributed to by Jamieson in his poem, have thrust that role upon Henry Touncil LeLièvre⁷ (1802-1882). The son of a French navy officer who had defected to the British army during the French Revolutionary Wars, Henry LeLièvre was not of ‘quite the right stuff’ to take his place among good British ‘gentlemen’ such as Lyon and Wilson. LeLièvre thus became the goat when, in reality, Lyon was entirely the author of his own downfall. LeLièvre had little or no interest in Elizabeth Hughes. He was dragged into the matter, initially, when Lyon, as a means of teasing and baiting Wilson, put it about that LeLièvre was being familiar with Ms. Hughes. In truth LeLièvre did not see Wilson as a “*barrier*” to anything, did not “*vow dire vengeance*”, held no “*malice in his heart*”, and did nothing to “*fan the latent flame*”. The murder by proxy scenario, and the prejudicial description of LeLièvre, is rooted in an account of the duel provided by David John Hughes (1820-1914) in a 1904 letter to the Perth *Courier*⁸. David Hughes was the younger brother of Elizabeth Hughes who later married John Wilson. The ‘LeLièvre as villain’ version of the duel was the creation of Elizabeth Hughes as she endeavored to resurrect her reputation from the unfounded accusations by Lyon, of a dalliance with LeLièvre, that had ignited the whole affair.

⁴ This is a puzzling and interesting ‘error’. The creek in question, which flows through the 8th and 9th concessions of North Elmsley Township, connecting Otty Lake to the Tay River, is correctly named Jebb’s Creek, named for Joshua Jebb (1793-1863) of the Royal Engineers who was among the party surveying the route from Brockville to the Tay River that would be followed by the first settlers travelling to Perth in 1816. Jebb’s Creek is, however, mis-named as Gibbs Creek on the Henry F. Walling map of North Elmsley Township, as published in the *Illustrated Atlas of the Dominion of Canada*, H. Belden & Company (1880). That Jamieson, who owned land within a half-mile of Jebb’s/Gibbs Creek, would have been referring to the map seems unlikely. That, in the early 20th century, the creek was commonly known by a mispronunciation as Gibbs Creek seems the most likely explanation.

⁵ At about the same time Jamieson was writing *The Hunter’s Bride of Otty Lake*.

⁶ Jamieson probably confused young Reade with his father, Apothecary George Hume Reade (1793-1854), who practiced as a doctor but was not involved in the duel.

⁷ The name LeLièvre is consistently mis-spelled as ‘LaLievre’ throughout the poem.

⁸ Once again, at about the same time Jamieson was writing *The Hunter’s Bride of Otty Lake*.

The poem's account of LeLièvre's actions at the duel itself is also false. After the first round of fire, Lyon did not "*proffer the amend*" but refused to apologize, thus Wilson's honor could not be "*satisfied*". Since Lyon was the offender, and still refused to apologize, when LeLièvre insisted upon a second round of fire, "*Load up again! LaLievre cried*", he was not acting maliciously; he was simply discharging his responsibilities as a Second to Lyon as dictated by the Dueling Code of 1777.⁹

Poet Robert Jamieson was born in 1848 at Kars, Rideau Township, Carleton County, the son of David Jamieson (1820-1914) and Mary Jane Gibson (1814-1889). He came to Perth as a teenager in the mid-1860s to study at the Grammar School and simultaneously worked in the local Post Office. He was employed briefly as a school teacher from 1866, but in 1871 went to work in the office of Archibald Cameron, Division Court Clerk at Perth. When Cameron died in 1873, Jamieson was appointed Division Court Clerk and held that post for 59 years. In the 1870s and 1880s he was also an insurance and real estate agent.

For 37 years from 1895 Jamieson was also Secretary of the Perth Board of Education. After a short stint as an elected Town Councillor, he served as the municipality's Collector of Taxes for nearly 40 years. In addition, he was, for 20 years, Secretary and Librarian to the Mechanics Institute (precursor to the Public Library), Secretary/Treasurer of the South Lanark Agricultural Association for more than 25 years and was frequently appointed a Returning Officer for Municipal and Provincial elections. At various times and for varying periods of time Jamieson also served on the Board of Directors of the Perth Electric Light Company, the Bathurst & Mississippi Macadamized Road Company, the Perth Cemetery Company and Royal Arcanum #1441 (a Fraternal Benefit Society). Jamieson also owned a farm at Elmsley Township C-10/L-26, on the southern outskirts of Perth, where he bred high quality Jersey and Ayrshire dairy cattle and traded in imported dairy breeding stock.

- Ron W. Shaw (2018)

⁹ For a detailed account of the 'Last Fatal Duel' see *Tales of the Hare: The Biography of Francis Tito LeLièvre – A Prequel & Sequel to the Last Fatal Duel*, by Ron W. Shaw (2014) ISBN 978-1-4602-1856-3