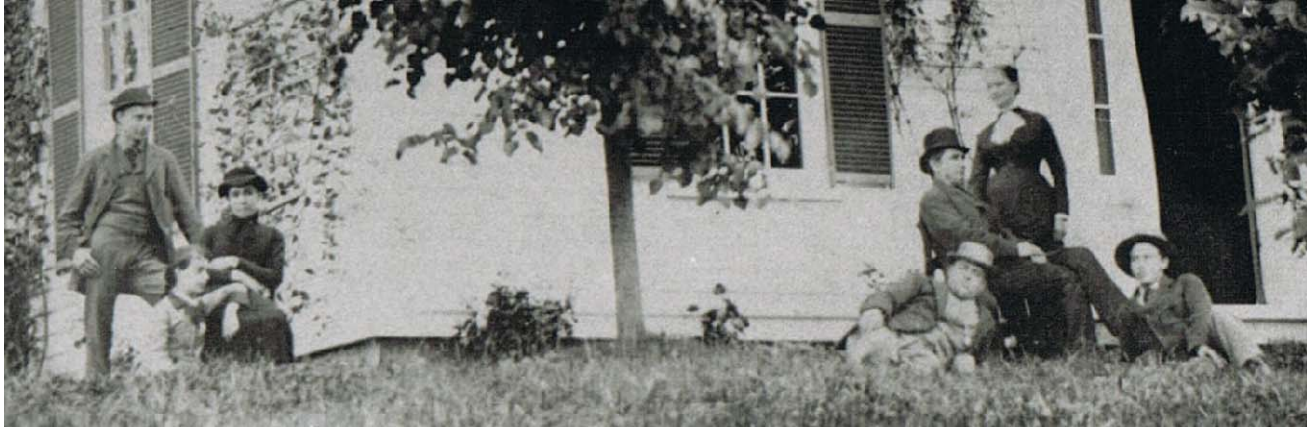


# Robert Dawson Senior



**Dawson Family** 85.13.1 DBP3B (cropped)

The man sitting on the right of the photograph with the tall hat is Robert Dawson Sr. Standing to his left is his wife, Martha, and Robert Jr., is on the far right lounging on the grass. Also lounging on the grass, to the left, is an unidentified man. The group on the left consists of J.K. Dawson (son of Robert Senior), standing, and Ella Dawson (daughter of Robert Senior), sitting on the grass. The woman is Marry Tupper.

Born in Port Mouton in 1812, Robert Dawson was the only son of a Scotsman from Aberdeen, Scotland. As a young man, Dawson worked as a clerk for Joseph Jennings, a merchant with a successful firm in Halifax.<sup>1</sup> Eventually, Jennings realized the talent for business that his young clerk possessed and Dawson soon became the manager of a new store that Jennings started on King Street in Bridgewater in 1848.<sup>2</sup> Shortly after, Dawson was able to buy out his employer and began his own business.

He married Martha Elizabeth, daughter of John N. Hebb in 1856.<sup>3</sup> Together they had five children. Three, Robert Jr., J.K., and Ella, survived to adulthood and outlived both their father, who died in 1894, and their mother, who died in 1911.<sup>4</sup>

Dawson's shop, Robert Dawson & Sons, was successful from its onset and Dawson quickly branched out to incorporate a wide range of products for sale. He engaged in shipping-

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<sup>1</sup> M. B. DesBrisay, *History of the County of Lunenburg*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Bridgewater: The Bridgewater Bulletin Ltd., 1967), 217.

<sup>2</sup> *Bridgewater Bulletin and South Shore Record*, Wednesday, 5 June, 1957.

<sup>3</sup> Scott Winston Teal, *The Hebb Mill Affair*, (Lower Sackville: Scott Winston Teal, 1994), 32.

<sup>4</sup> South Shore Genealogy Society. *Cemetery Inscriptions for Lunenburg County*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, Vol. A (The South Shore Genealogical Society, 1995), 128.

having Benjamin Harrington build him the brigantine, *Micmac* in 1862,<sup>5</sup> -and came to own a mill and wharf.<sup>6</sup>

Robert Dawson was widely known as a generous and reliable businessman, and was a prominent person in the community. Talking about Dawson's death on January 18, 1894, Judge Mather Byles DesBrisay stated that Dawson was "A man of sterling integrity, high principle and gentlemanly manners, he succeeded in impressing all who knew him most favourably, and his death makes a gap in our community that cannot easily be filled".<sup>7</sup> Dawson also served the community being involved in a long list of groups and holding various positions including Chairman of the Board of Fire Wardens, Commissioner of Schools, Treasurer of the Bridgewater Agricultural Society, and he was a member of the Masonic Lodge.<sup>8</sup>

Robert Dawson was, by all accounts, a successful, honest businessman for forty-five years. He worked hard to build up his business to the best of his abilities and his legacy was continued after his death by his two sons, Robert and J.K.

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<sup>5</sup> DesBrisay, 579.

<sup>6</sup> DesBrisay, 200.

<sup>7</sup> DesBrisay, 218.

<sup>8</sup> DesBrisay, 218.



## 831 King Street: The Home of One of Bridgewater's Most Influential Businessman

### **Dawson Residence c.1900**

85.13.2 DBP3B

Perched on a hilltop overlooking the beautiful LaHave River, 831 King Street was built for Robert Dawson, Sr., in 1864. By this time, Robert Dawson had already established himself as a successful businessman, owning and operating a firm on King Street, in the heart of the town's commercial area.

The original structure was simpler in design to the house that now sits atop the hill, just past Victoria Road. It has undergone two major renovations: the first in 1900 and the second in 1948 to 1950.<sup>9</sup> According to a descendant of Robert Dawson, the original structure would have

been two and a half storeys tall with the attic, but had a peaked Gothic dormer over the front door (See photo of Dawson House, 85.13.1 DBP3B). There was no veranda present, nor was the door flanked by two storey bay windows as it is now. It also had nice gingerbread decoration under the eaves.<sup>10</sup> At the back of the home there was a kitchen ell with a small porch.

The house was built in the Picturesque style, with its two chimneys, central door and dormer, and its decoration. The Picturesque style describes a building



### **Dawson House c.1880 85.13.1 DBP3B**

Photo of the original structure

Note the Gothic dormer over centered front door and gingerbread trim can faintly be seen lining the eaves

<sup>9</sup> Bill Plaskett, "831 King Street," Built Heritage Files (September 26, 1985), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Prof. Robert MacGregor Dawson Letter to Bill Plaskett, *831 King Street Inventory Site Form*, Built Heritage Files (December, 1984), 1.

with a pitched gable roof, a centered doorway, a large central dormer with gothic window, two chimneys and gingerbread trim along the eaves.<sup>11</sup> Each of these elements is present in the original structure based on early photos.

The renovations in 1900, likely done by Robert Dawson, Jr., the eldest son of Robert Dawson Sr., added a tower, a veranda with intricate decoration, nice turned brackets and



**Dawson Porch c.1900** 85.13.6 DBP3B

After the 1900 renovation.

Note the curved, highly decorated veranda and the door now on the corner of the house

balustrades, and a bay window which was placed on the upstairs windows. At this time, the front door was moved from the centre of the house to the corner,<sup>12</sup> and it now featured sidelights and transom window. Clearly, by moving the door to the side creating an asymmetrical facade, the addition of a tower and

adding the decorative veranda, Robert Dawson, Jr., was attempting to rid the house of its Picturesque style in favour of

capturing more elaborate decoration.

The renovations in 1948-1950, by Robert MacGregor Dawson, Sr., undid the Victorian elements that were added by Robert Dawson, Jr. The veranda was taken off, the tower was removed, and the door was returned to its original position in the centre of the house. However, Robert MacGregor Dawson, Sr., did not stop there. He added two, two-storey bay windows on either side of the door and made further structural changes by pushing the facade of the house six feet outward, towards the road at the same time as the kitchen ell at the back of the house was replaced with a larger structure after the hill behind the house was dug out to extend it back another six feet.<sup>13</sup>

The house that stands today is that of the 1948-1950 remodel. Little remains of the original structure or the decorative elements of the 1900 renovation when the house took on a more elaborately decorated Victorian style. It now stands with a large, centered front door

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<sup>11</sup> *A Nova Scotian's Guide to Built Heritage, Architectural styles 1604-1930*, Nova Scotia Department of Culture, Recreation & Fitness, 9

<sup>12</sup> Prof. Dawson Letter.

<sup>13</sup> Prof. Dawson Letter

flanked by two-storey bay windows. Above the door is a small pedimented dormer. Double chimneys give the house a symmetrical feel. The large ell is still present at the back of the house.<sup>14</sup> The carriage house at the back of the property is original, but has also undergone renovations and now serves as a guest house.<sup>15</sup>

The house stayed in the Dawson Family for four generations. Upon the death of Robert Dawson Sr., Robert Dawson, Jr., and his wife moved into the home after a short stint in the Fletcher B. Wade house located at 45 Pleasant Street. Martha Elizabeth, the wife of Robert Dawson Sr., moved out of the house on King Street after the death of her husband and moved into Ivy Banks, the home of the late Judge Mather Byles DesBrisay at 59 Pleasant Street.<sup>16</sup> The house then passed to Robert MacGregor Dawson, upon the death of Robert Dawson Jr., and subsequently onto his son.

On the A. F. Church map, showing Bridgewater, completed in 1883, the Dawson house was called "Pine Grove". However, it was actually called Pine Hill due to the many pine trees on the property, and the location of the house atop a steep slope.<sup>17</sup>

The Dawson House can still be seen perched overlooking the picturesque LaHave River, and still possesses charm and character, if not the original facade.

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<sup>14</sup> Plaskett, "831 King Street," 1.

<sup>15</sup> Harbour House, "Beautiful Bridgewater Home & Building Tour Program," June 18, 1998.

<sup>16</sup> Tom Sheppard, *Historic Bridgewater*, (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing Limited, 2008), 45.

<sup>17</sup> Joan Dawson email to Linda Bedford, June 25, 2010.

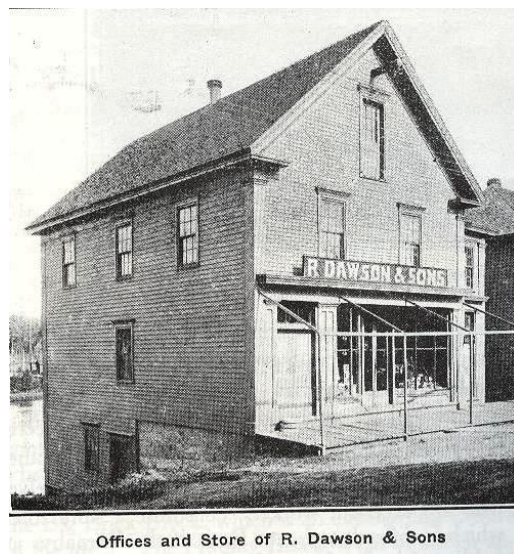
## 668 King Street- The oldest Business in Town

Robert Dawson, Sr., built his business around the same time he built his home at 831 King Street. In 1848, after serving under Joseph Jennings, a merchant with a store in Halifax, Robert Dawson became the manager of a new store Jennings opened in Bridgewater.<sup>18</sup> Not long afterward, Dawson was able to buy out his employer, and he set up shop in the building across the street, on the river's edge.

The firm began as a general store selling mostly hardware, and quickly transformed into a store for numerous things including lumber, feed, machinery, and more. In the Nova Scotia Directory for 1864, Robert Dawson is listed as a merchant.<sup>19</sup> In 1890, Robert Dawson & Son was listed as general merchant, ship owner, and lumber.<sup>20</sup> In less than 30 years, the firm branched out into other commercial fields; owning his own vessel would have surely given Dawson an edge over his competition.



**Dawson Wharf** 84.15.47 DBP9 PC



Offices and Store of R. Dawson & Sons

**Dawson Store** Busy East, page 43  
View of the store R Dawson & Sons,  
sometime after 1890. Note the  
returning eaves in the front, and the  
visible corner boards and the hood  
moulding over each window

The building itself remains remarkably intact for its 145 years of use as a commercial space. It is a large two and a half story building, built on the sloping bank of the river. Built in the Greek Revival style with its gable roof, it is complete with wide corner boards topped with decorative capital

<sup>18</sup> DesBrisay, 217.

<sup>19</sup> *Hutchinson Nova Scotia Directory, 1864-65*, 396.

<sup>20</sup> *McAlpine's Nova Scotia Directory for 1890-97*, 864.

mouldings, returning eaves, and hood mouldings over the windows.<sup>21</sup>

In 1885, the business of Robert Dawson became known as Robert Dawson & Son and in 1890, it was again changed to Robert Dawson & Sons.<sup>22</sup> Each name change was to incorporate on of Dawson's sons, Robert Jr. and J.K., into the business, making it truly a family venture. Today, the building still serves as a store.

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<sup>21</sup> Bill Plaskett, "668 King Street," Built Heritage Files (September 26, 1985), 1.

<sup>22</sup> *The Busy east of Canada: Bridgewater on the Beautiful LaHave*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (The Busy East, Sackville, N.B. 1918, reprint, Liverpool, Nova Scotia: Morton's Printing & Publishing, 1993), 42.

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