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# Doors Open Lambton County

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## STEADMAN BROTHERS FUNERAL HOME

3050 Brigen Road

Brigen, ON

Saturday, September 29, 12pm-4pm

Sunday, September 30, 12pm-4pm



## STEADMAN BROTHERS FUNERAL HOME

The building used by the Steadman Brothers Funeral Home was constructed in the 1860s as a boarding house. The Steadman family purchased the home in 1929 and renovated it for use as the funeral home.

### Heritage Significance

This building is one of the earliest in Brigden – quite possibly Brigden’s third oldest surviving building.<sup>1</sup> The home had originally served as a boarding house for local railroad workers in the 1860s and was located beside the Canada Southern Railway track.<sup>2</sup> This business is the second oldest business in Brigden continuously operated by the same family.<sup>3</sup>

### History of the Building

This 1860s building has witnessed many renovations throughout its life. After its purchase for use as a funeral home in 1929, it has been expanded and modernized numerous times. The staircase to the second floor is in its original location and marks the south side of the original home. The chapel located to the left of the staircase occupies the area of the original home. Originally, there was a narrow hallway beside the staircase with separate doors that provided access to two rooms. Wooden ceiling beams delineate the location of the original walls in this chapel/visitation room. A set of French doors provided access from the hallway to the west room. (Andy retains these doors in his home.)

The railway tracks ran alongside the building – the unofficial “street” on the north side of the building. “Every time the train came into town, Grandma Ella [Ellerby’s wife] said the windows would rattle and the clock in the parlour would shake and the pendulum would stop.” (*Brigden*, pg. 56)

Additions were built in 1940, 1950, 1958, 1960, 1975, 2003 and 2007. The building now encompasses 6,500 square feet.

When the business first began, what we now regard as standard features of a funeral home – the chapel and visitation rooms – were missing. Funerals of Protestants were always conducted in the deceased person’s home unless the person was someone of prominence whose funeral would attract hundreds of people. In these instances, the funeral would be held in the church. The Mass of Christian Burial for Roman Catholics was usually held in the church. In Brigden, it was not until the 1940s that people began to express the

need to re-locate the embalming process of the deceased and the funeral itself to a “funeral home”. (Prior to this, the embalming process was accomplished in the person’s home -- and, specifically, the kitchen -- with the use of the funeral director’s “cooling table”). The Steadman Brothers responded to that need by providing a visitation room in the business, which had, until that point in time, been used for preparation of the bodies and as an office.



1950s. The small light standard has a cross painted on the glass globe which indicated that ambulance service was available. Photo credit: Andrew Steadman.

### Renovations Timeline

**1940** – the first renovation of 1940 converted the former parlour and dining room into a “family room”, 20 feet x 20 feet - an open porch was also added on the southwest corner – the porch column on the porch’s southwest corner and its wooden tongue-and-groove ceiling have not been altered - brown insulbrick <sup>4</sup> was installed on the exterior walls – the “brick” is still found on the home’s original west and north exterior walls – expansion of the second storey on the south side

**1950** – the porch was closed in – further expansion of the second storey on the south side – a small square room was added to the southeast corner of the building in order to provide access to the preparation rooms

**1958** – addition of the Main Chapel on the south side – the windows from the enclosed porch were removed and were installed by the neighbour in his backyard shed – they can still be seen in the south wall of the shed at 3046 Brigden Road – two windows on the second

storey of the front (west side) were removed and replaced by one large window

**1975** – addition of the front foyer and a new chapel on the north side – now used as the North Visitation/Gathering Room – additions on the north, south and east elevations expanded the second storey – basement was added under the front foyer and a deeper basement was dug under the original home – this permitted a renovation of the casket room and the addition of basement washrooms

**2003** – addition of a new garage and preparation room on the east side

**2007** – addition on south side adds the South Visitation/Gathering Room – flat roof on the front foyer is changed to a peaked roof – new canopy incorporated into the roof over the west entrance – renovations allow wheelchair accessibility

**2009** – renovation of the shed/garage directly east of the funeral home into a garage for the fleet of hearses and vehicles as well as an equipment storage building – the old shed had formerly belonged to Dean Core, who owned the Ford Dealership (located at 3026 Brigden Road) – it was located in the lot immediately to the north (currently used as a parking lot) – its doors originally faced south – when the shed was re-located behind the funeral home, the doors were re-oriented so that they faced north (their current orientation) – in the renovation of 2009, the old metal was stripped off the frame and the building's frame was enlarged

### Stained Glass Windows

The stained glass windows in the south wall of the Main Chapel and Visitation Room were originally installed in Dr. Percy Seager's home located across the street at 3035 Brigden Road. The east and west windows were originally installed as transoms in the east and north windows of the Seager's parlour. The centre window with the open panel was installed in the south square extension of the home. This square extension was Dr. Seager's office and was entered by a separate door. The doctor's home and office shared the same front porch. The clear panel in the centre of the stained glass would have been inscribed with the doctor's name.

The stained glass window that hangs behind the casket bier was originally installed in a church in London, Ont. "Paul brought the glass home in a bushel basket and spent most of the winter putting the pieces together like a puzzle." (*Brigden*, pg. 56)

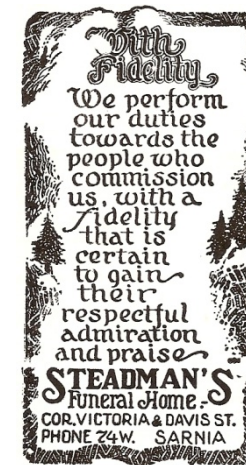
### Features and Furnishings

- leaded clear glass windows date from the first renovation in 1940 – the remaining leaded glass windows are: the window at the base of the original staircase; and the cupboard in the original office (now the music room) – the window at the base of the staircase replaced the front door of the 1860s home
- original upstairs staircase from the 1860s home
- staircase to the basement was removed from an old farmhouse on Moore Line near Mooretown – the house was slated for demolition - Paul and Andy Steadman installed it during the addition of the front foyer in 1975
- the fireplace mantle in the South Visitation/Gathering Room was the home's "original" mantle (that dates from the 1890s) – during one of the home's renovations, it was removed and installed by Lyle Steadman into his family home at 3065 Brigden Road – the Steadman home was later sold – just prior to the renovations of 2007, Andy was contacted by the owners of his former family home and asked if he would "like to take back the fireplace mantle" – he gladly agreed and installed it – other than the addition of an electric fireplace insert, the mantle required no restoration and has never been refinished

### History of Steadman Brothers Funeral Home

Steadman Brothers, established in 1906, operate the oldest funeral business in Lambton County.

The Steadman family settled not far from Brigden during the time of the Fenian raids (mid-1860s). In 1906, Frederick "Ellerby" Steadman, along with his brothers, "D. M.", David Marshall Steadman, and "J. R.", Joseph R. Steadman, entered into business together when they began a furniture store on Petrolia's main street in a former pool hall just west of St. Paul's Methodist (now United) Church. (*Brigden*, pg. 56) In the 1940s, they re-located the funeral home and ambulance service to Joe's residence in Petrolia.<sup>5</sup> D. M. Steadman, the youngest of the three brothers, was one of the first embalmers in the area, starting at the age of 16. J. R. Steadman was the oldest of the brothers, and served as Mayor of Petrolia in 1930-31 and 1938.



1930s advertisement

In 1929, they expanded their services to Sarnia. In Sarnia, they established a funeral home and ambulance service at Victoria and Davis Streets (currently D. J. Robb Funeral Home). They operated the first motorized ambulance service in Lambton County.



Ellerby and Ella Steadman. Photo credit: Andrew Steadman

Ellerby moved to Brigden in 1927 and purchased Mr. Henry Windsor's undertaking business which was located at the northwest corner of Brigden Road and Courtright Line. The upstairs was used by Leopold Masonic Lodge and the Oddfellows Lodge for many years.<sup>6</sup> (The inscription plaque for the Windsor Block constructed in 1884 rests in the front garden of the present Leopold Lodge at 3017 Brigden Road.) In 1929, Ellerby and his wife, Ella, purchased the present property and conducted business from this location after re-locating from the Windsor Block.

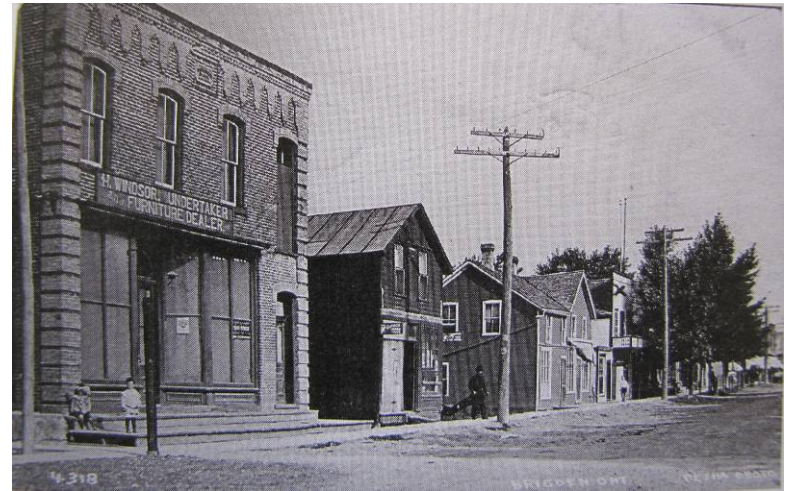
After Ellerby's sudden and premature death in 1944, Ella operated the business. Their sons, Lyle and Paul, took over the funeral home, at which time Lyle and Paul were only in high school. Paul then received his funeral director's licence in 1949 and Lyle received his in 1951.

In addition to the funeral home, Paul and Lyle also operated Steadman's Brigden and District Ambulance, Steadman Flooring and Furniture Store and an Ontario Vehicle Licence Bureau (located in a small white-painted clapboard frame building immediately south of the funeral home). Lyle was the father of Andrew and David Steadman who operated Steadman's Brigden and District Ambulance and Parkway Ambulance in Corunna until 2000 when the County of Lambton took over the private ambulance services. At this time, Andrew and David took over the funeral home.

David, Andrew and his son, Mark, are the third and fourth generations to own and operate Steadman Brothers Funeral Home.

### The Family Firm's Fleet

The Steadman brothers, like their father and grandfather before them, have preserved and retained many of the vehicles that were used throughout the history of the business. They are understandably proud of 1953 and 1956 Ford Sedan Delivery hearses and a 1959 Superior Cadillac Sovereign Royale Landaulet 3-way coach.



Main Street, Brigden, ca. 1910. Showing the Windsor Block built flush to the sidewalks on the northwest corner of Main Street and the 4th Line of Moore Township (now Courtright Line). Photo credit: *Brigden, A Glimpse Into the Past*

The business's earliest vehicle is a 1905 horse-drawn hearse built by A. B. Greer of London donated by the family to **Moore Museum** where it is on display. The one hearse no longer in the fleet is the one that the Steadman's purchased about 1930 – among one of Lambton County's first motorized hearses (and quite possibly, *the first*).<sup>7</sup>

The 1953 and 1956 hearses have a local connection and a provincial significance. They are both Ford sedans purchased a half block south of the funeral home from Dean Core, who owned and operated Brigden's Ford dealership (3026 Brigden Road). Upon their purchase, both sedans were customized by one of Ontario's most talented and internationally renowned hearse designers and fabricators. John J.C. Little of Ingersoll, Ont. customized these two classics.

In 2010, the Steadman's donated the business' 1969 Ford Chateau ambulance to **Moore Museum** where it is currently on display in the Fire Hall. When it was outfitted as an ambulance<sup>8</sup>, it reflected a change in the way ambulance service was delivered. In most rural areas, it was not deemed practical to have a vehicle reserved solely for the use of patient delivery. (Paramedic treatment enroute to hospital was still many years into the future.) Thus, many hearses in rural areas of Ontario prior to the early 1970s were furnished with a siren and canopy flashers which distinguished their need in an emergency to move through traffic at a higher speed than what was normally the case. (The Steadman's 1953 hearse was the one fitted with the canopy flashers and siren.)



Steadman Brothers first motorized hearse  
 .., Petrolia ca. 1930. The hearse was probably custom-made (ca. 1923-1930) and fitted on a Chevrolet body. Photo credit: *Petrolia, A Century and a Half of History*.

<sup>1</sup> Two other buildings in the community may pre-date the funeral home. The residence at 3045 Brigden Road was built in 1853. Underneath its siding, the residence at 2380 Sydenham Avenue reveals its log construction which may indicate a construction date in the 1860s.

<sup>2</sup> The Canada Southern Railway was a line that connected St. Thomas, Ont. with Buffalo, New York. In the 1860s, an ambitious plan was envisioned to extend the line from St. Thomas through southern Ontario into Lambton County with its terminus on the east bank of the St. Clair River. A railcar ferry would connect southern Ontario to St. Clair, Michigan. From its American terminus on the west bank of the river, the line would proceed through Michigan into Illinois in order to reach Chicago. However, hostile relations between two competing railway companies on the American side meant that the railroad in process of construction never made it farther east than Jackson, Michigan. (Lauriston, pg. 270) The prospect of an international railway line that would have challenged the monopoly of the Great Western Railway (known after amalgamation in 1882 as the Grand Trunk) that operated the international railcar ferry from Point Edward, Ont. to Port Huron, Mich. had vanished.

By 1873, the Canadian portion of the route had become a reality and the railway stretched from St. Thomas to Courtright -- the town which the railway founded and which became its western-most terminus.

Brigden benefitted greatly from the arrival of the railroad. The railroad transformed Brigden from an isolated hamlet to a bustling industrial, commercial and agricultural centre. Timber was transformed into lumber and staves; clay was transformed into clay tiles and bricks which were then shipped to any markets made accessible by the railroad. The railroad put Brigden and Courtright on the map – literally and figuratively. Both villages were named by the railroad – Brigden for William Brigden, the railroad's construction engineer, and Courtright for

Milton Courtright, the railroad's president.

<sup>3</sup> The oldest business in Brigden continuously operated by the same family is Boyington Agricultural Equipment established in 1911. The fifth generation of the Boyington family assumed responsibility for the business in early 2012.

<sup>4</sup> It has proven difficult to locate a good history of insulbrick. A very brief history of insulbrick can be found in the article, "Asphalt Siding Inspection, Defects, Diagnosis, Repair Advice" on the *Inspectapedia* website: [inspectapedia.com/exterior/Asphalt\\_Siding.htm](http://inspectapedia.com/exterior/Asphalt_Siding.htm)

<sup>5</sup> The Petrolia business was sold to Bill Jay in the 1940s and now operates as the Needham-Jay Funeral Home in the same building.

<sup>6</sup> The site of the first two buildings is the Brigden parkette maintained by the Brigden Horticultural Society. The third building is the office of McCormick's Lambton Mutual Insurance Company.

<sup>7</sup> The Steadman's first motorized hearse (ca. 1923-30) was one which featured carved wooden panels that simulated draperies. After the vehicle ceased to function, the panels were removed and formed the walls of a chicken coop located behind the funeral home. When the chicken coop was being demolished in 2001, a local resident asked for the panels. He is currently working on building a reproduction of the original hearse and has been able to use one of the panels to create replicas of the originals.

<sup>8</sup> "Paul and Lyle bought a 1969 Ford Chateau van from Dean Core [Ford dealer in Brigden] and re-fitted it with Ron Krohn's help into an ambulance. The Ministry of Health came to Brigden, took pictures and measurements, and all new ambulances were designed from it." (*Brigden*, pg. 56) The Ministry contributed the colour scheme – blue and white, being the Ministry's representative colours.

***This ambulance -- the prototype for all the ambulances in the province of Ontario in the early 1970s – is one of only 2 surviving examples.***

#### Chief Sources

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