

PROMINENT FAMILIES OF THE PERIOD

ZACCHEUS AND ASA BURNHAM JR.

Zaccheus and Asa Burnham Jr. served their local community well and laid the foundation for its political prominence.



Zaccheus Burnham

THE HONOURABLE ZACCHEUS BURNHAM 1777-1857

WHO HE WAS:

Zaccheus Burnham and his brother Asa, were among the first settlers in the Cobourg area, arriving in 1798 after the arduous journey from New Hampshire through the Mohawk Valley. Together they bought up large amounts of land north of Elgin Street at Burnham Street, where they founded the village of Amherst that for many years was the area's most important settlement. Here the first court house was built, and it was largely through the influence of the Burnhams that **Cobourg was chosen as the county seat**. That decision had a profound impact on the history and development of the area.

In 1801 he married his first cousin Elizabeth Choate (1780-1863). His one son Mark was educated at Oxford, England and later was rector at Peterborough. Of his four daughters three married prominent local men.

Zaccheus was a shrewd businessman and farmer. Arriving with less than \$100, by his death in 1857 he had amassed a fortune approaching \$1,000,000. The Burnham farm was one of the first commercial farms in the district.

WHAT HE DID HERE:

With his considerable landholdings Zaccheus Burnham was actively involved in the development of the area's transportation systems. He was Road Commissioner for the Newcastle District and active in the development of **the Cobourg Harbour and the Cobourg and Peterborough Railway**. He petitioned for regular ferry service on Rice Lake as early as 1833. He also invested in the steamship *Cobourg* and was appointed to the Board of Commissioners to establish the Trent Canal.

A Justice of the Peace, he was first elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1831 and then appointed to the Legislative Council in 1839. He also held the office of Judge of the District Court for the Newcastle District and was its treasurer.

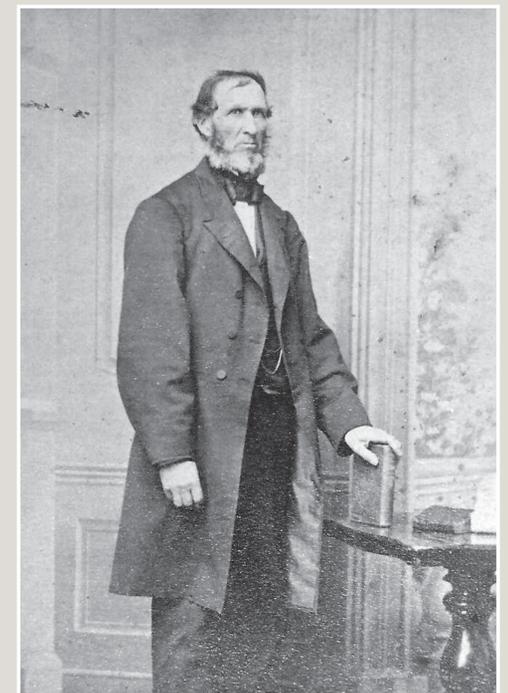
At the time of his death Zaccheus was considered to be the largest landowner in the district, particularly in the Peterborough area where he founded Ashburnham. He was clearly a very active man in his community with a huge influence on the social and economic development of this region.

Though heavily involved in his business dealings, Burnham was also active in military, political and philanthropic pursuits. In 1801 he entered the local militia and **participated in the War of 1812** having risen to captain. Troops may have been quartered and fed on his farm, and it's also said that he transported supplies for the war along Lake Ontario. Later as colonel he was **active in the Rebellion of 1837.**

THE HONOURABLE ASA ALLWORTH BURNHAM 1808-1873

Asa Burnham Jr., nephew of Zaccheus, followed his uncle's example of leadership in Cobourg. In many ways his life mirrored that of his distinguished uncle. The son of Asa and Sarah Lovekin Burnham, by 1837 Asa Jr. was established as a farmer, married to Elizabeth Wilmot (1813-?) of Newcastle, and father of three. The Burnhams would eventually have 13 offspring. He was a member of several agricultural societies, treasurer of the local Northumberland society and has the distinction of being **the first person to grow turnips in this area.**

Burnham was also associated with the local militia for 40 years and achieved the rank of major, **serving during the Rebellion of 1837.**



Asa Burnham



Elizabeth Wilmot

WHAT HE DID HERE:

Politics was central to Asa Burnham's life. He started his career as a member of Cobourg's Board of Police, later becoming a member of the Town Council and **finally Mayor (1861-62)**. He was Chair of the inaugural Public School Board established in 1847 and Chair of the Board of the Cobourg Collegiate. He also served locally as Warden of the United Counties of Northumberland and Durham. Unlike many at Amherst, he supported the petition for the Incorporation of Cobourg in 1837. In 1860 his daughter Annie danced with the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII, at the opening of Victoria Hall.

Like his uncle he was also **a member of the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council** and treasurer of the United Counties. He attained the further distinction of being **appointed to the first Senate** of Canada in 1867 and remained a senator until his death in 1873.

His funeral procession consisted of over a mile of carriages and it was estimated that over 2,000 people attended his funeral and heard him praised for his benevolence, his kindly disposition and his broad and liberal mind.