

# **The Historical Society of St. Catharines**

P.O. Box 25017, 221 Glendale Avenue, Pen Centre,  
St. Catharines, Ontario L2T 4C4

Our mission and goal: to increase the knowledge and appreciation of the history of St. Catharines and area. The Society was founded in 1927. Our Society is affiliated with the Ontario Historical Society.

**Our website is: <http://stcatharineshistory.wordpress.com>**

## ***March Newsletter***

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### **Lecture Program – April 28, 2016 through June 23, 2016**

*Program Subject to Change*

#### **Thursday, April 28, 2016**

Historian and prolific author David Hemmings will offer an illustrated talk entitled “Virgil & Homer – What History?” based on books he has recently published about two neglected topics -- one on the important Niagara crossroads town of Virgil, the other on the vanishing village of Homer.

#### **Thursday, May 26, 2016**

Historian Peter Vronsky, Professor of History at Ryerson University and author of a recent book on the Fenian Raids, will offer an illustrated talk about this, the last foreign invasion of Canada which occurred in June 1866, 150 years ago next month.

#### **Thursday, June 23, 2016**

For this special meeting to be held at Rodman Hall Art Centre, historian Nancy Cameron will give an illustrated talk about “Early Artists of St. Catharines.” Come learn about the artists and see examples of their work.

#### **SOCIETY NEWS**

*The Society gratefully acknowledges the support of the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Culture.*

## Society Notes

**Membership Dues Reminder:** Your Society membership needed to be renewed on September 1, 2015. Our membership form for the 2015-2016 is enclosed on the last page of this newsletter. If you wish to receive a membership card, notify John Calvert at: [jcalvert57@hotmail.com](mailto:jcalvert57@hotmail.com). We are also now sending the Newsletter to members by e-mail, so we ask that you provide your e-mail address on the membership

### Historical Society Show and Tell Meeting January 30, 2016 St. Catharines Historical Museum

The first meeting of the new year was called to order at approximately 7:30 p.m. by President John Burtiak. About 70-75 members/guests were present.

Anthony Percival representing the Museum showed a Y- Club blazer which had been donated to the museum by Sydney Carruthers. It appeared to be from c. 1967 and bore many local badges representing various schools, mainly the St. Catharines Collegiate, and clubs.

Sheridan Alder presented one of the original poppies from 1921.

Lesley Taylor brought her late father's log books from World War Two. He flew in a Lancaster Bomber on many missions until 1944 when his plane crashed over Germany and he was presumed dead. She also showed a book about the inauguration of the memorial at Runnymede to lost airmen, as well as several photos.

Maurice Gomme told the story of meeting some 'Gomme' relatives many years ago in England. He showed and told the history of the 'Gomme shilling' from c. 1811 which they gave to him. It was an example of privately minted money tolerated by the British government at the time of the Napoleonic wars.



Photo from our Show and Tell Meeting

Susie Hastings brought a sterling silver teapot presented to her aunt when she 'retired' from teaching to get married. She was an Irvine from McNab.

Anne Beresford brought a framed copy of page one of the August 20, 1892 *Toronto Globe Magazine* featuring many photos and glowing references to St. Catharines.

John Calvert brought two tiny leather-bound school books that had been presented as prizes out west in the 1880s as a tribute to a teacher named Violet Dunn.

A guest from Welland brought photos of his time working in the far north (featuring a baby polar bear) and below Lake Erie, as well as a fossil from 1600 feet below.

Another member brought World War One illustrated greeting cards bought at a local church sale.

Dennis Walker brought in several historical photos of St. Catharines and area, including two with the Charles Taylor auto showrooms (King St.) in the background, and one view of a woman standing in front of the former swing bridge on Niagara St.

Mike Sullivan showed medals and documents from his grandfather and an uncle - one of them being Thomas Sullivan, who died in World War One, October 5, 1916 in the Battle of the Somme.

Other items shown were: a pewter plate (from ca. 1770s) and pewter creamer; another silver plated creamer; a sign for medicine that hung in the window of the Coyne drug store in Niagara-on-the-Lake (from the sister-in-law of Carol Baggott Forte); and two T.J. Hill portraits of ancestors.

(This report is a composite of write-ups done by Dennis Gannon and Elizabeth Finnie)

### **NEWSLETTER NOTES**

The Historical Society of St. Catharines Newsletter is published up to four times per year. The purpose is to inform the membership of issues pertaining to the Society and items of historical interest. Comments and queries should be directed to the Society's postal address. Opinions and comments expressed in the Newsletter are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect those of the Society. Subscription to the Newsletter is by paid membership only. This issue is edited by Dave Willer.

### **Donation of Local History Book**

*Introduction* (by Elizabeth Finnie):

In July of this year, 2015, the Historical Society of St. Catharines received a letter from Stephen Harding of the London and Middlesex Historical Society. An old book had been found in the "bargain bin" of Attic Books, an antiquarian bookstore in London, Ontario. Mr. Harding recognized that the book might be of some significance to local historians in our area. Printed in 1842 by George Desbarats & Thos. Cary, it was inscribed: "To the Freeholders of Grimsby and Clinton, from Wm. Hamilton Merritt, MPP". The book itself was titled *Appendix to the First Volume, of the Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada, session 1841*. According to Mr. Harding, the book contained "a very complete set of accounts for the Welland Canal, among other canal related items and sundry government business."

Mr. Harding offered to mail the book to us for only the cost of postage. Of course our interest was piqued and we replied in the affirmative. Very shortly thereafter we received the book, carefully packaged in a special acid-free box. Several HSSC board members, as well as former HSSC president Alex Ormston, then got together one afternoon in Special Collections, St. Catharines Public Library, to open up the book and examine it.

I will leave it to Brian Narhi to describe the book. Having ascertained that in our opinion the book was worth keeping and repairing, we decided to donate it to Special Collections because of its age, its local provenance and its potential use to researchers of local history. But first it needed repairing, and this Brian agreed to do. As many of you know, we are fortunate to have Brian in our midst as he is quite an expert in

the field of old books and their restoration. The other question was whether the signature of William Hamilton Merritt was authentic. We compared it to one or two other WHM signatures and certainly it appeared very close. Possibly the writing was almost too uniform. In these days it is difficult to imagine how precise and painstaking handwriting used to be. Eventually we felt that if it was not WHM's own signature, it must have been done by his clerk or personal secretary.

*Restoration of Book* (by Brian Narhi)

The book which was donated to the Historical Society earlier this summer was once a much larger volume. It was originally published in Kingston in 1842 by Desbarats and Carey as the "Appendix" to the first volume of the *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of Canada*. It contained appendices lettered "A" through "W," which presented reports on a variety of subjects which had been investigated by government committees. Other reports were submitted by local officials at the request of the government and included in this collection. They dealt with topics such as the state of the penitentiary in Kingston (including the names of the prisoners, and the state of the health of the prisoners), the election riots in Toronto around the time of the Upper Canada Rebellion, vital statistics for Lower Canada, and statements showing the volume of goods shipped between Upper and Lower Canada and the duties collected on various items. Due to a possible printers error, or because of a mistake when the book was bound, a few of the appendices were inserted out of their proper alphabetical sequence. The appendices varied in length, some being relatively short, while others ran to more than 50 pages in length. The volume was not paginated, but it contained around 800 pages.

At some point during the lifetime of this book, it suffered from the indignity of becoming a "breaker." This is the term used when an unscrupulous antiquarian book dealer, or a collector, splits the binding in order to remove certain sections of the text or engravings---either for re-sale or for other purposes---which leaves what is essentially a damaged book fragment. The removal of entire sections of a book greatly impacts upon its value, as well as its appeal for the serious collector. Several of the appendices were removed from this book, amounting to a total loss of just over 130 pages. The binding of the book (a "fixed back" leather spine) was split open and the cords and stitching were cut in order to remove these sections of the text. As a result, there was a substantial loss of material as well as most of the stamped lettering from the leather spine.

The main repair to the book required the re-sewing of the signatures on linen tapes. One replacement page (a photocopy) that was provided with the book was "tipped in" (glued) into its proper place in the book. In order to add strength to the text block, a strip of mull (a stiff fabric resembling cheesecloth) was glued to the spine. In addition to providing strength to the back of the book, the tapes and the mull help to form a strong hinge to which the covers would later be attached. New head and tailbands were applied to the top (head) and bottom (tail) of the spine.

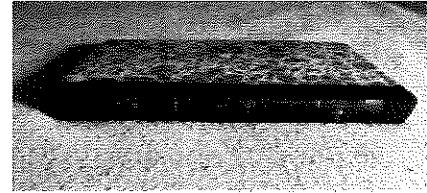
The covers on the book were in relatively good condition and were retained during the rebinding. The book was originally "quarter bound," ie, a leather spine with rich, blue marbled papers applied to the exterior of the boards. A new hollowback spine was created using bookbinding cloth, rather than leather which would have been more expensive, but which is still extremely durable. The remnants of the stamped leather spine were glued directly to the spine. The inner hinges (gutters) at the front and back of the book were further reinforced with strips of acid free laid paper. Not only does this provide additional strength to the hinges, but it also matched the original endpapers and helped to cover up the underlying cloth that would have been partially visible.

There were a few tears present on some of the pages within the book. These were mended using an archival quality Japanese tissue. These natural fibre tissues provide a strong repair, which becomes nearly transparent when applied to the paper allowing the print to show through. Unlike adhesive tape, the Japanese tissue will not discolour, and can easily be removed (if necessary) with the application of a little warm water.

The book is once again in a very good state of repair. Despite the missing pages, what remains contains a wealth of fascinating government reports and information that will be of potential use to students, historians and genealogists alike. The next time you are in the downtown library, remember to stop into the Special Collections room and ask to see this rare piece of Canadiana!



Spine of book before repair



Spine of Book after repair

### **Alex Ormston (1943-2016)**

Our longtime and stalwart member of the Historical Society, Alex Ormston, passed away on March 20, a great and irreplaceable loss to the St. Catharines heritage community.

Alex had deep family roots in St. Catharines. And he had an abiding and deep interest in the history of the City and area, which he researched tenaciously and shared generously. Alex served for several years as curator of the St. Catharines Historical Museum in the early years when it was still located at the former Merritton Town Hall. He was associated with various local heritage committees over the years, including being President of our Society. Most recently, Alex was actively conducting research for the Welland Canal Fallen Workers Memorial Project.

Alex was the consummate researcher/historian – that can be said without reservation. His many hours of volunteer research at the Library’s Special Collections and at the Museum has left us a vast quantity of material. He was indeed the “go-to-guy” – he knew the history of the City of St. Catharines as no one else – that is, more precisely, than all of us put together.

His vast files of research remain his legacy and it is incumbent on us to ensure that it is preserved and made available for present and future generations.

Alex will be missed.

JB

**The Historical Society of St. Catharines**

**Membership Renewal**

For membership year **September 1, 2015 through August 31, 2016**

Membership Dues: **Individual \$10.00; Family \$15.00**

Make cheques payable to: The Historical Society of St. Catharines

Mail to: The Historical Society of St. Catharines  
P.O. Box 25017, 221 Glendale Avenue, Pen Centre  
St. Catharines, Ontario, L2T 4C4

Your membership information will not be shared with any other group or business.

Note: As this is a general mailing, if you have already renewed your membership, please disregard this notice.

For your record: Renewed on: \_\_\_\_\_, 2016 - Cheque in the amount of: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*Remove the form below and return with your remittance*

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**The Historical Society of St. Catharines**

**Membership Renewal**

For membership year **September 1, 2015 thorough August 31, 2016**

I wish to renew my/our membership: **Individual:** \_\_\_\_\_ - **Family:** \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

postal code/zip code: \_\_\_\_\_

My/Our telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

I/we would like to receive Society meeting reminders and notices by e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

I/we would like to receive Society Newsletter by print: \_\_\_\_\_

My/Our e-mail < \_\_\_\_\_ >

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_