

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>

September 2014 Newsletter

Lecture Program –September 25, 2014 through February 26, 2015

Program Subject to Change

Thursday, September 25, 2014:

Presentation by Ian Brindle – Topic: **September Salute to Brock University**

The September meeting of the Historical Society will feature Brock Professor Ian Brindle talking about the early years in the history of Brock University. This presentation is the Historical Society's salute to the university, one of the most important institutions in this region. This year the university is celebrating the 50th anniversary of its opening, which occurred in September 1964.

Thursday, October 23, 2014

Presentation by Nancy Cameron - Topic: **Tales for an Autumn's Eve: Accounts of the Strange, Curious, and Mysterious from Downtown's Past**

This illustrated talk presents a number of colourful stories from downtown's little-known and more eccentric history, featuring extraordinary and 'other-worldly' events and characters.

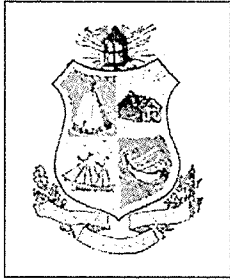
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Thursday, January 22, 2015

Presentation by David Hemmings – Topic: **Prisoners of War during the War of 1812**

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enlisted man, and something known as a "parole" was an important element in the whole prisoner of war process. David Hemmings will explain it all at our January 22nd meeting!

Thursday, February 26, 2015

Presentation by David Webb – **Topic: The Farmerettes during World War One**

Former Parks Canada employee, and World War One expert, David Webb will talk about the institution of the Farmerettes during World War One -- a way of utilizing women to take up the slack in agricultural work at a time when tens of thousands of peacetime agricultural workers were called away into the military. The Farmerettes proved to be so successful that they were utilized again during World War Two. Come to our February 26th meeting and hear the details.

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, 2014. Our membership form for the 2014-2015 is enclosed on the last page of this newsletter. If you wish to receive a membership card, notify John Calvert at: 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 form.

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.

Submission Deadline for the December 2014 Newsletter is November 30, 2014.

Oh, What a Lovely War! The Coverage of the Openings Days of the Great War in the St. Catharines Standard **By Dave Willer**

This year marks the one-hundredth anniversary of the start of the First World War. With the clarity of hindsight, we remember this war as a landmark event which forever changed the course of history. To many, the year 1914 marks the real beginning of the twentieth century – a century ravaged by industrialized warfare and slaughter on an unprecedented and, until that time, unimaginable scale.

By the end of the Great War and in its immediate aftermath, millions of soldiers had died, four imperial dynasties, which had ruled for centuries, were toppled, and with the arrival of the United States of America into the war in 1917, a new superpower would emerge whose predominant influence in world affairs remains to this date. The world would never be the same.

The Great War ushered in a new era for Canada: women would be granted the right to vote in federal elections, conscription would be mandated for the first time (leading to riots in Quebec), and over sixty-thousand soldiers who left Canada to fight for King and Empire would not return. Far away places such as Ypres, the Somme and Passchendaele would enter into the everyday vocabulary of Canadians.

The changes brought by the Great War seem so monumental and traumatic that is difficult for us – one hundred years after the war’s beginning – to understand how so few people at that time foresaw what was going to happen. The popular refrain at that time of “Home by Christmas” shows that at the war’s beginning in August of 1914, many contemporaries believed the war would be a short one. There are countless stories about men rushing to enlist to ensure they would not miss this adventure.

Once the United Kingdom declared war on Germany on August 4, 1914, Canada (which was at that time a Dominion in the British Empire with no independent foreign policy) was also at war with Germany. The coverage of these events in the *St. Catharines Standard* provides some insight into the local reactions to the declaration of war. The following is an excerpt from an article entitled “*Crowds Blocking Queen Street in the Fever of their Loyalty Sang and Cheered for the Empire*” which appeared in the *St. Catharines Standard* on August 5, 1914:

Never in the history of St. Catharines was loyalty and patriotism and enthusiasm so wildly demonstrated as during last night. A record crowd numbering thousands accumulated in front of The Standard office reading the bulletins, and when the flash came that Germany had declared war on England¹, the people cheered and cheered and then cheered again. Hats were thrown into the air and solid citizens slapped each other on the back and yelled themselves hoarse. Then Rev. Mr. Brownwell started in on “God Save the King”. In an instant every hat was raised, and the great throng lustily joined in singing the National Anthem. It was an inspiring scene...At the corner of Geneva and St. Paul streets [sic] a big bonfire blazed away and added its quota to the excitement. It was long after midnight that things quietened down so that peacefully disposed citizens could get to sleep. It was a certainly a great night for St. Catharines.

The coverage of another presumed local rally (the location of which is not mentioned) takes the reader into the realm of the absurd. An article in the same August 5th, 1914 edition of the *St. Catharines Standard* entitled “*Cheered His False Teeth Clean Out*” states that:

Talk about enthusiasm! When a man cheers so enthusiastically over the war news that he loses his teeth and never misses them – well [he’s] fairly enthusiastic, that’s all. If the gentlemen who lost his false teeth last will call at the police station the chief will restore to him the missing molars.

There are also a few articles in the August 5th *St. Catharines Standard* paper which provide a glimpse of some of the darker chapters in Canadian and world history which lie ahead. An article entitled “*The Welland Canal and the Foreigners*” makes reference to supposed reservists in the German and Austro-Hungarian armies who are employed in a “*certain industrial institution adjacent to the Welland Canal*”. It also notes that in Welland, “*there are many hundreds of foreigners, some of whom are Austrian and German.*” No further details are provided. During the course of the war, this concern and paranoia over the loyalty of some immigrants, primarily those from Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, would lead to the internment of approximately 8,000 individuals throughout Canada.

¹ Interestingly, Germany never actually formally declared war on the United Kingdom at this time or at any time during the war.

There is another article which notes in passing that the “*Cunard giantess Lusitania*” would be shipping out of New York harbour and across the Atlantic Ocean. Just over nine months later, on May 7, 1915, the Lusitania would be torpedoed by a German submarine off the coast of Ireland. A total of 1,195 people on board died, including 128 Americans. The loss of American lives caused by this German submarine would be a factor in the United States’ declaration of war against Germany less than two years later.

Although the *St. Catharines Standard* contains short, albeit sanitized, articles on the opening battles on the Western Front, one cannot help but notice a sense of giddiness throughout the paper over the start of the war. In particular, there is an ad from MacSween & Co. tailors (see below) which has the headline “*War! War! War!*” and then opens with the sentence: “*In the excitement caused by the news from the front, don’t forget your clothes.*” For the sports fans, there is even an article entitled “*The War and the Baseballers*” which lists a few dozen professional baseball players of German descent and laments that if they leave to fight for Germany and begin “*practicing the goosestep, why we will know that it is time to close the ball parks. Then we will realize how serious war is.*”

Looking back, one cannot help but notice the carnival-like atmosphere at the rallies following Canada’s entrance into the war. While we can never know the private thoughts of the people at these events from only reading a newspaper article, at times it seems like we are reading more about a pep rally for an upcoming sporting event rather than the beginning of a war. Of course, our reaction today is coloured by our knowledge of what was to come. We wonder: How many of those young men at the rally on Queen Street would fight overseas and never return? How many of those at the rally would lose a son, a father or husband by the war’s end? One hundred years later, we are well aware of the destructive impact of modern warfare. We do not find war to be a joke. So when we read about the rallies in St. Catharines on August 4, 1914 and the enthusiasm caused by the start of the First World War, we are in many ways reading about the twilight of one era and the dawn of another era which has been called the “suicide of civilized Europe”.

WAR! WAR! WAR!

In the excitement caused by news from the front, don't forget your clothes. The law says you must wear them even though the climate may not demand it. We have opened Tailoring Parlors in the new block at 152 St. Paul Street, first floor over St. Charles Cafe, and our business is to clothe the naked. Clothes don't make the man but they help a lot. Our location affords us the privilege of saving you \$5.00 on every suit, for our expenses are light, and though we are upstairs, we will meet you on the level and deal with you on the square. Our stock which is now arriving will be found to comprise all the newest weaves, and latest colorings from the best mills in the foreign markets. We handle nothing but imported goods, and will carry as fine a selection as is to be found any place in town, we can give you the latest English or American style in cut and finish, just what you want and the way you want it. We think it is to your advantage to meet us face to face. Our motto, satisfaction guaranteed, or we don't want your money. Give us a call even if you don't want to buy you may some other time.

MACSWEEN & CO.
152 St. Paul Street St. Catharines
PRACTICAL TAILORS

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St. Catharines in 1876

By John Burtiak

One of the most useful sources of historical information about the Niagara Peninsula is the well-known Illustrated Historical Atlas of the Counties of Lincoln & Welland, Ont., compiled and published by H.R. Page, of Toronto in 1876 (and since reprinted three times in recent times). Locally and commonly referred to as Page's Atlas, it contains maps, plans, portraits and views of buildings, farmsteads and prize-winning cows from throughout the two counties and their townships, towns and villages, with generous and informative text.

St. Catharines, of course, appears in the Atlas, and the entry here is reprinted below, providing a picture of our fair town nearly 140 years ago, on the eve of attaining cityhood. In fact, the compiler, aware of the imminent incorporation as a City, published a full two-page supplement elaborating on the City's successes and prospects that was inserted in the Atlas (sometimes missing in the original edition). This will be reprinted, in full, in two parts in subsequent issues of our Newsletter.

St. Catharines

"St. Catharines is the largest and most populous town on the Niagara peninsula, and one of the most thriving business cities in Ontario. Most of the land on which the town is built was purchased in 1816 by the Hon. Wm. H. Merritt from the Hon. Robert Hamilton of Queenston. The purchase consisted of about four hundred acres, the greater part of which was a level plateau, on the south of which is the ridge commonly known as "the mountain." At that time the amount of the assessment for the whole township (Grantham) was considerably under four hundred dollars, and the number of rateable inhabitants was only 164. From the year 1784, when Butler's Rangers were disbanded, until 1824, when work commenced on the Welland Canal, the increase of the population was very slight in Lincoln and Welland. From this time forward there was a steady flow of new comers to this portion of the Province, and many of those who came settled at St. Catharines, which was then known the "The Twelve". It was afterwards called "Shipman's Corner," and finally it received its present name from Catharine, the wife of Robert Hamilton. The first store was opened in St. Catharines about 1810 by a Mr. Chisholm, who soon after had W.H. Merritt as a partner. The first tavern as built in 1797 by a Mr. Adams. It was afterwards passed into the hands of Paul Shipman, from whom St. Paul street received its name. It was about the year 1796 that the first church was built in this part of the country, and which was, with the exception of the old Mohawk church at Brantford, the first in western Canada. This building served as an hospital for the Canadian army during the war of 1812-1815, and remained standing until 1836, when it was destroyed by fire. In the year 1816 was commenced what has since been the means of making St. Catharines a popular summer resort – we refer to the development of the salt and mineral springs, and William Hamilton Merritt was the first mover in what has since become so important a feature in the prosperity of the town. The mineral waters of St. Catharines are now known far and wide for their health-giving virtues.

In 1826 the population of St. Catharines was about 600, and it contained quite a number of stores and workshops of various kinds. In 1827 measures were taken by some of the prominent inhabitants for the building of an academy at a cost of \$4,000. This was successfully accomplished, and the institution,

which was known as Grantham Academy, was opened on the 14th September, 1829. It flourished for a long time as a seat of superior education for the Niagara District, but subsequently becoming financing involved, it lost its usefulness as an academy, and, at the present time, with additions which have been made to it, is used as one of the school buildings of St. Catharines. In November, 1843, the population of the village, as taken by Mr. Gillelland, then assessor, was 2,354, and in 1845 it was incorporated as a town. In April 1846, the steady increase of population was still apparent, the number of inhabitants at this time being 3,462. During the same year the first water works of the town were commenced; in 1853 the Port Dalhousie and St. Catharines Railroad was begun, and in the following the streets of the town were, for the first time, lighted with gas.

St. Catharines owes a great deal of its prosperity to the fact of its possessing unsurpassed water power, the water being supplied from the Welland Canal through a race which begins at Merritton, and which gives power to scores of different manufacturing establishments, and employment to hundreds of workmen. Some of the buildings used for manufacturing purposes will vie with, and many surpass any in the Dominion, in stability of structure, and superiority of improved labor saving machinery used in them. To her manufacturing interests St. Catharines owes a greater debt for her prosperity that can be estimated. The advantages which can be had here and in the immediate vicinity for manufacturing purposes are unsurpassed in the Dominion, and with a water power which never fails, it has rare facilities for shipping goods by rail in all directions, and by vessels to all ports of the lakes or to foreign ports. The shipping interest of St. Catharines is much larger than is generally supposed; upwards of seventy vessels given their port of hail as St. Catharines, and the several ship yards in and around the city are at all times the scenes of stirring activity.

Of Masonic, Odd-Fellows, Orange Lodges, Temperance, and other societies of various kinds, St. Catharines has its full quota, and all of them are at the present time in a most flourishing condition.

For fine church edifices and school buildings, St. Catharines enjoys a most enviable, but merited reputation. Wherever the eye may be turned a church spire can be seen, or the neat and commodious building devoted to the education of the youth. Recently St. Catharines has been elevated to the dignity of a city, its population at the present time being upwards of 12,000 – and there is little doubt that it will ultimately develop into one of the most successful and prosperous cities of the Dominion.

Protestant Home

The Protestant Home in St. Catharines, was established in Jan. 1875 by the “Ladies’ Christian Association” who in the distribution of their charity found the need of a “Home” to enable them to shelter aged persons and children, otherwise left to the mercy of the world. From the association the officers and Board of Directresses are chosen, and the “Protestant Home” is under the care of a matron. This institution is sustained by Public subscription, and was incorporated under the “Charity Aid Act,” on the 14th of Jan. 1876.

St. Catharines Public Schools

Prior to 1853 the Common Schools of St. Catharines were in a very incipient condition; the trustees having no school houses in their own right, were obliged to hire buildings for the purposes as best they could. In the above named year progressive steps were made in the erection of two brick school houses, at a cost of \$4,000 each – not including furniture – and the employment of an efficient staff of teachers. These two schools were known as the St. Thomas and St. George’s ward schools. For a time these new institutions afforded greater facilities for education than the town had ever possessed before, the teachers