



## The Historical Society of St. Catharines

P.O. Box 23104, 124 Welland Ave., St. Catharines, Ontario, L2R 7P6

Founded in 1927. Our Mission and Goal is to increase the knowledge and appreciation of the history of St. Catharines and vicinity.

Our Society is affiliated with the Ontario Historical Society.

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

# March 2009 Newsletter

## Upcoming Speakers Program

All Meetings start at 7:30 p.m. at the St. Catharines Museum

**February 26 – Prof. Alun Hughes: “The Myth of Laura Secord: Seeking the Truth Beneath the Chocolate Coating”**

**March 26 – Mary Friesen: “The Ransom Goring Journals”**

**April 23 – Annual Meeting and Speaker – Brian Leyden: “The History of St. John’s Anglican Church, Port Dalhousie”**

**May 28 – Sharon M. Chandler and Jim Lawrason: “Air Commodore Len Birchall”**

*The Society gratefully acknowledges the support of the Ontario Ministry of Culture*

---

### **Notice of Annual Meeting – Thursday, April 23, 2009 – 7:30 p.m.**

To be held in the Burgoyne Room, St. Catharines Museum, 1932 Welland Canals Parkway, St. Catharines.

#### **Agenda**

Call to Order, President’s Report, Minutes of Previous Annual Meeting (held April 24, 2008 and published in the March 2009 *Newsletter*), Financial Report, Auditor’s Report, Amendments to Constitution, Nominations and Elections, Any Other Business properly brought before the membership, Close of Formal Meeting, Guest Speaker, Announcements, Reception.

---

### **Reminder: 2009 Calendar Year Membership Renewal**

If you have overlooked your renewal, the Society encourages you to renew and keep our Society strong.

Individual \$10.00 or Family \$15.00 - Make cheque payable to: The Historical Society of St. Catharines. Please mail renewals to the Society address at the top of the page or attend the next Society meeting!

## Auditors and Nominations to the Board of Directors

### **Auditors**

The financial books close December 31 and the Auditors are handed the books in March to prepare an audit for the Annual Meeting in April. The Board of Directors will be appointing two auditors. If you would be willing to audit the Society Financial Records please advise any current Executive member.

### **Nominations and Elections**

Executive positions will be for a two-year term. Director positions will be for a one-year term.

The following nominations have been received: President – John Burtniak; Past President – Bill Stevens; Vice President – Paul Lewis; Treasurer – Chris Loat; Secretary – vacant

Director (maximum six to be elected) – Gail Benjafield, Elizabeth Finnie, Mary Leighton, Joe Muskat, David Sharron, Dennis Gannon.

Please give some thought about giving some time to the Society, as we need to ensure that the Society continues with a strong Board. Please contact Bill Stevens or any Executive member if you would be willing to be nominated for any position.

## Constitution Amendment

Article 4.0 Membership – 4.2 “The Membership year is January 1 to December 31.” It is proposed by the Board of Directors to amend 4.2 to read: “The Membership year is September 1 to August 31.”

Note: the Fiscal Year will remain the calendar year.

## A Warm Welcome to Our New Members

Bob Bell, Joe Galaburda, Sharon and Jane Dulong, Daniel J. Broyld, Melanie and Danny Dumont, Mary Friesen

## In Memoriam

BRUCE WOODRUFF, a Society member for several years, passed away on November 18, 2008. The Society extends heartfelt sympathies to his wife Gloria and family. Bruce began his career as a reporter for the Niagara Falls Evening Review and then as a teacher in elementary, and latter in secondary schools. Bruce became a Professor of Language Studies at Mohawk College, a position he held for 26 years. He was a candidate in the 1974 federal election. Bruce contributed greatly to his community. He was a working member of the London Little Theatre and produced two operas for the Hamilton Opera Corporation. He and his wife, Gloria, restored and designated the 1839 Woodruff family home, Woodbourne, St. David's. Bruce served on the NOTL Heritage Committee and the Willowbank School of Restoration Arts Board, initiated the St. David's Ratepayers Association and St. David's Heritage Day. Bruce was laid to rest in the St. David's United Church Cemetery.

## 33rd Annual Oille Fountain Potting Ceremony

Saturday, May 23 - 11:00 a.m.

Plan to attend this special event to be held at the Oille Fountain located at the corner of King and James Streets in downtown St. Catharines. Descendants of the OILLE family are invited to attend. A geranium will be planted in the urn atop the fountain. Why not make a day of it, as Saturday is “Mother’s Day at the Market.”

## Newsletter Notes

The Historical Society of St. Catharines *Newsletter* is published up to 4 times per year by the Society. The purpose of the *Newsletter* 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 postal address. Opinions and comments expressed in the *Newsletter* are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect those of the Society. Subscription by paid membership only. Bill Stevens produced this issue.

**Next Issue: June 2009** - Deadline for submissions for the next issue is May 10, 2009.

## **Minutes of the Annual General Meeting Thursday April 24 2008**

Burgoyne Room, St Catharines Museum, Welland Canal Parkway, St Catharines

President John Burtniak opened the meeting at 7.35 pm and welcomed approximately 61 people to the meeting. He noted that a quorum was present so that the meeting could proceed.

### **Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, April 26 2007**

It was noted that the Minutes were published in the June 2007 newsletter. It was moved by Bill Steinman and seconded by Bill Stevens that the minutes be accepted. There were no errors or omissions. Accepted.

### **Auditors Report (Copy attached)**

Tom Whitelaw and Carol Gaspari reviewed the 2007 Financial Report and the related transaction register, expense claims and bank statements for the year. In their opinion the report fairly represents the financial position of the society as of December 31, 2007.

It was moved by Tom Whitelaw and seconded by Joe Muskat that the auditors report be accepted. There were no questions. Accepted.

### **Treasurer's Report (Copy attached)**

The Treasurer was absent. The Financial Report for 2007 shows a Total Income of \$4308.74, Total Expenses of \$3522.08 and a deficit of \$786.66. Total assets \$10480.57.

### **Membership Report**

Mary Leighton reported a membership total of 180 to date.

No amendments to the Constitution were put forward.

### **President's Report**

The President thanked the membership for their continued support and reported a "good year" with interesting speakers and topics. He thanked individual board members for their work during the year. He noted that a person is still needed to look after refreshments

He announced upcoming events and other items of interest to the membership including celebrations at the Oille Fountain, the old Grantham Township building and the Merritt statue and a combined event at the St Catharines Public Library featuring the DVD "Echo of the Future" Information about the June bus trip to the Sharon temple will be in the next newsletter.

There was no response from the membership regarding ideas or announcements for the "Good of the Society"

### **Nominating Committee Report**

Bill Stevens, as chair of the Nominating Committee noted that Officers of the Society serve a two year term so that they would remain unchanged: President: John Burtniak, Past President: Bill Stevens, Vice President: Paul Lewis, Secretary: Brenda Zadoroznij, Treasurer: Chris Loat.

He noted that Directors of the Society serve a one year term and that six directors had agreed to stand again: Paul Hutchinson, Joe Muskat, Maurice Gomme, David Sharron, Elizabeth Finnie and Mary Leighton.

It was moved by Alex Ormston and seconded by Bill Steinman that this slate of officers be accepted. Accepted.

No other names were put forward following calls for nominations from the membership.

It was moved by Joe O'Brian and seconded by Mike Conley that the slate of six directors be accepted. Accepted.

### **Other Business**

A draw was made for the winner of the 'early bird draw' and was won by Richard and Monika Taylor.

It was noted that Alex Ormston and Neil Stevens had both been featured recently in the 'Standard'.

The membership was reminded of the upcoming conference of the Ontario Historical Society at the University of Guelph (June 13).

The speaker for the evening, John Burtniak was introduced by Alun Hughes.

John's presentation "Some Vanished Villages of Niagara" began with a definition of 'vanished villages' and 'ghost towns'. He cited various reasons for settlements to vanish including changes in traffic patterns and the decline and disappearance of railways and canals.

The first village to be featured was **Jordan Harbour** on the 20 mile creek flowing into Lake Ontario. The village once boasted a post office, school, hall, bridge, warehouses for fruit and cottages along the lake for summer visitors.

**Silverdale Station** consisted only of a store (a combined Co-Op and post office) and the station where local grain was loaded.

**Miller's Bay- Shipyards** was located on the Niagara River where the present day Marina is situated. Several ships were launched there and the area had a hotel, boarding house, post office and railway station. **St John's** on Holland Road was in existence around 1790. Situated on the 12 mile creek it was home to a saw mill, grist mill and an iron foundry. There was quite an industrial complex there and it all went into decline after the first Welland Canal was built.

Other 'vanished villages' that were mentioned included DeCew, Reynoldsville, Thorold South, Homer, Black Forest Corners, Stromness, Netherby, Brookville Station, Hunterton, White Pigeon and Caister Centre.

The presentation was illustrated by postcards and drawings.

The speaker was thanked by David Sharron.

A social time with refreshments followed the meeting.

Minutes recorded by Brenda Zadoroznij, Secretary

### Some Reminiscences of Grantham Township

On November 27, Bob Bell recounted some of his varied experiences as a local politician in Grantham Township from the 1950s through to the 1980s.

Bob Bell was born in 1921 in Louth Township, descended from the Loyalist Secord and Pawling families. He worked at McKinnon Industries (now General Motors) for forty-seven years before retiring in 1986. During the Second World War, Bob served in the Canadian Army and the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Bob's political career began in 1959 as a Councilor on the Grantham Township Council and then as an Alderman for the Grantham Ward on the new (after amalgamation) St. Catharines City Council. He remained an Alderman until 1969 when Regional Government came to Niagara. From 1970 to 1985, Bob was a Councilor on Regional Council. Among his body of work includes time on the Planning and Development Committee, the Shaver Hospital Foundation, the St. Catharines General Hospital Board of Governors and the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority. Currently he is the Executive Director of the Hotel Dieu Shaver Health and Rehabilitation Foundation.

Bob brought to politics the farmer's attitude of never promising what one cannot deliver. He and his fellow representatives strived to get things done without wasting a vast amount of time or money. They were closer to their constituents than today's politicians.

In 1961, Grantham and St. Catharines had grown to the point where amalgamation was necessary. Bob was a member of the committee responsible for naming all of the streets affected by the amalgamation. In one day from 7:00 to 12:00 pm, a mere five hours, street names were called out, checked by the Clerk and voted on for all of the streets in the newly aligned city.

In 1972, Bob became the Chairman of the Regional Planning Committee, a position he held for several years. After eight years of preliminary work, the Committee met with the Provincial Cabinet to get the Region's first Official Plan approved. Niagara thus became the first municipality with a Regional Policy Plan in Ontario.

Bob was also part of the initiative in 1959 to create the Lester B. Pearson Park. It came about when the opportunity arose to get the property for a dollar a year. The space was ideal for a public recreation area and remains so today.

Bob's talk was very informative and highlighted the accomplishments of those who dedicated their time to making Grantham Township, St. Catharines and the Region a better place in which to live. He ended his talk with the words, "Grantham was a great Township with great people. The good old days were not all that bad."

## **History of the Silver Spire United Church**

At our October 23, 2008 Meeting Rev. Dr. Phil Cline spoke to an audience of 40 about the Silver Spire United Church. In January 2008, St. Paul Street, Welland Avenue and Memorial United Churches voted to amalgamate at the St. Paul Street site. The amalgamation took effect on July 1, 2008 and a new church congregation named Silver Spire, with over 700 members, was established. The Welland Avenue and Memorial church buildings were vacated and sold.

The history of St. Paul Street United Church begins with the earliest known record dated 1816 showing "Methodists" meeting at the home of Rufus Wright, at the corner of Ontario and Trafalgar streets, for the worship of God and spiritual fellowship. Brothers Rufus and Gershom Wright were staunch Methodists and they played a large role in promoting the faith in St. Catharines.

During 1822-24, when Rev. Ezra Adams was the Pastor, the land on St. Paul Street was purchased and a frame chapel was erected. The settlement of St. Catharines continued to grow, as did the congregation, and St. Catharines became an independent circuit in 1832. Egerton Ryerson, later known as the founder of the public school system in Ontario, became the first superintendent. The St. Catharines Circuit extended many miles in all directions, including Thorold, Beaver Dams, St. Johns, and beyond. In 1854, St. Catharines and its immediate vicinity were made a separate circuit, and the remainder was set aside as another circuit with two preachers being appointed.

The continued growth of the congregation saw the chapel expanded with an addition in 1845. Eventually a new building, the present church, was built during 1860-63. The building contract was given in March 1861 to Henry Burgoyne. The new building was ready for use in 1863, and it cost approximately \$12,000. Subsequently, in 1870, a spire was added at a cost of \$2500.

In December 1870, a meeting of the Quarterly Official Board was called to consider building a new Wesleyan Methodist Church on Welland Avenue. A resolution to that effect was unanimously carried, and a Board of Trustees for the new church was recommended. Early in 1871 the lot for the building was selected and the Board of Trustees chosen. In 1875 a new Wesleyan Methodist Church on Niagara Street was also built (the predecessor of Memorial United) and in 1876 it was united with St. Paul Street United Church, the connection lasting for several years.

On January 10, 1876, the St. Paul Street building was nearly destroyed by fire. Thanks to the efforts of the fire brigade the flames were kept inside the walls and roof, and while the damage was extensive, the building was saved. Restoration, however, cost a large sum (\$10,000) at a time when there was a financial depression in Canada that also affected the local area. The Welland Avenue Methodist Church became independent in that same year, and in 1879, Niagara Street, Louth and Grantham churches were made into a separate circuit.

In 1890 the present Sunday school was erected, the old church being removed to make room for the new building. Over the next century many improvements were made to the interior of the building. In 1909 an organ was installed. The building survived yet another fire in 1962 and was again restored. The building has received a heritage designation. A brief description on a plaque reads as follows:

"366 St. Paul Street: Built of red brick, favoured by the Methodist Church, the structure was built in 1861 having rounded windows, pinnacled and centre towered Italianate style. Although the church was seriously damaged by fire, the original structure was retained in the reconstruction of the building. The exterior of the original church remains as constructed in 1861 with the exception of change of the front entrance in 1956."

More information can be found on the Silver Spire United Church web site: <http://www.silverspire.ca/>

### **Heritage Grant**

The Society is very pleased to receive a Provincial Heritage Development Grant of \$496.00 and we thank the Ontario Ministry of Culture for this assistance with our programs.

### **At the Museum**

Exhibit March 9 through August – Rock My Soul: The Black Legacy of Rock and Roll from the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Cleveland, Ohio.

## Highlights of 2008

January 24 - Ian Ellingham: lecture: "My Nicholson and MacBeth Gate" - attendance - 45

February 22 – Professors Carmela Patrias and Larry Savage: lecture: "The History of the Labour Movement in St. Catharines" - attendance - 56

February and March - Donation of books titled "*The Enterprises of Robert Hamilton: A Study of Wealth and Influence in Early Upper Canada 1776-1812*" and "*Provisional Constitution and Ordinances for the People of the United States*" to the Special Collections Department of the St. Catharines Public Library

March *Newsletter* published -- Launch of Society's new web site

March 27 - Alun Hughes: lecture: "Lord Simcoe, Lady Godiva and the Naming of Niagara's Townships" - attendance - 88

April 24 - Annual Meeting and Elections of the Board of Directors - 61 members present

April 24 - John Burtiak: lecture: "Vanished Villages of Niagara" - attendance - 61

May 10 - Oille Fountain Potting Ceremony - Mayor Brian McMullen attended and served as Chief Potter. The Society also participated in the Heritage designation of the former Grantham Township Hall

June *Newsletter* published

May 22 - Pat Menon: lecture: "William B. Allan, Architect" - attendance - 45

June 5 - Preview Showing of "Echo of the Future: A Tale of Sunnyvale" in conjunction with the St. Catharines Public Library - attendance - 26

July 3 - Celebration of William Hamilton Merritt's Birthday at Merritt Statue, followed by a walking tour of Yates Street - attendance - 14

September *Newsletter* published

Sept 25 - Denis Cahill: lecture: "From Glass Negatives to Digital Images: How *The Standard's* Negative Collection Was Created" - attendance - 126

October 23 - Rev. Dr. Phil Cline: lecture: "The History of St. Paul Street United Church" - attendance - 42

November 11 - Society placed a wreath at the Cenotaph during the Remembrance Service

November 27 - Bob Bell: lecture: "Some Reminiscences of Grantham Township" and Christmas Social - attendance – 68 -- Museum Exhibit open to Society compliments of Museum

Donation by Society of a recently received 1938 Lacrosse Schedule to the Lacrosse Hall of Fame & Museum

December *Newsletter* published

Membership for 2008 - paid-up membership at year-end was 193

### January 22<sup>nd</sup> Program – Canada Hair Cloth

A good crowd of 61 turned out to hear the evening's speaker, Jim Macfarlane, relate the history of his family's manufacturing company, Canada Hair Cloth. Founded by the prominent local family, the McSloys, in 1884, the company remained in the family for well over 100 years. Up until recently the business manufactured hair cloth from horses' tails for the lining of suits. Jim brought in several samples of these products for the members to examine.

The building, a well-known landmark behind St. Paul St., still remains in Jim's hands although it is being expropriated in order for the City and Brock University to create joint arts school/performing arts centre.

We wish Jim and his family well as their building begins a new chapter after these many years.

## Historic Timeline of the War of 1812

Along the Niagara Frontier

### 1812

**June 18** - United States President James Madison signs Declaration of War against Great Britain

**July 12** - American forces under Brig.-Gen. William Hull cross Detroit River and invade Upper Canada at Sandwich

**August 16** - British forces under Maj.-Gen. Isaac Brock capture Fort Detroit

**August 24** - Maj.-Gen. Isaac Brock returns to Fort George (Niagara), Upper Canada after capture of Detroit

**October 9** - American forces capture British brigs *Caledonia* and *Detroit* (subsequently destroyed) in the Niagara River, off Fort Erie, Upper Canada

**October 13** - Major artillery duel between Fort Niagara (below Youngstown), New York and Fort George

**October 13** - Battle of Queenston Heights, Upper Canada

**October 13** - Death of Maj.-Gen. Isaac Brock and Lieut.-Col. John Macdonell at Battle of Queenston Heights

**October 16** - Funeral for Brock and Macdonell at Fort George

**November 10** - American Navy under command of Commodore Isaac Chauncey gains control of Lake Ontario

**November 28 - 30** - American forces under Brig.-Gen. Alexander Smyth invade Upper Canada across the Niagara River at Fort Erie

**November 28** - Battle of Frenchman's Creek, near Fort Erie

### 1813

**January 9** - British Declaration of War against the United States

**March 17 - 18** - Artillery duel between Black Rock, New York and Fort Erie

**April 27** - Battle and surrender of Town of York, Upper Canada to U.S. Maj.-Gen. Henry Dearborn; American Forces take control of the Great Lakes and subsequently burn Town of York

**May 25 - 27** - Artillery barrage on Fort George and capture by American forces

**May 27** - British troops under Brig.-Gen. John Vincent abandon Fort George; retreat along lakeshore westward toward Burlington Heights, Upper Canada (passing through Grantham Township, Upper Canada)

**June 6** - Battle of Stoney Creek, Upper Canada

**June 8** - Engagement at Forty Mile Creek (Grimsby), Upper Canada; American forces retreat to Fort George, passing through Grantham Township

**June 9** - American forces burn Fort Erie and withdraw their forces from Fort Erie, Chippawa and Queenston to Fort George

**June 22** - Laura Secord leaves her home in Queenston and walks to DeCew House, Thorold, Upper Canada

**June 24** - Battle of Beaver Dams (“fight in the Beechwoods”), Thorold

**July 5** - British forces under Col. John Clark of the 2nd Lincoln Militia from Chippawa raid Fort Schlosser, on Niagara River, north of Buffalo, New York

**July 8** - Action at Butler’s Farm at Two Mile Creek, Niagara, Upper Canada

**July 11** - British forces under Lieut.-Col. Cecil Bisshopp and Col. Clark Raid Black Rock, New York

**July** - British General John Vincent establishes his headquarters in George Adams’ home in Grantham Township (near the bridge over the Twelve Mile Creek near the village of St. Catharines)

**July 29** - Action at Burlington Beach, Upper Canada

**July 31** - American forces raid and occupy Town of York for a second time

**August 7 -10** - U.S. fleet battles British fleet on Lake Ontario

**August 8** - *USS Hamilton* and *USS Scourge* sink in a storm on Lake Ontario off Twelve Mile Creek

**August 24** - Action at Fort George

**September 10** - Naval Battle of Lake Erie

**September 28** - Burlington Races (Naval encounter) at Burlington, Upper Canada

**October 19** - American forces destroy and pillage George Adam’s home, distillery and bake house in Grantham Township (near the bridge over the Twelve Mile Creek near the village of St. Catharines)

**December 10** - American Forces under Brig.-Gen. George McClure evacuate Fort George and burn Niagara, Upper Canada and retreat to Fort Niagara

**December 12** - British forces re-occupy Fort George

**December 19** - British forces capture Fort Niagara

**December 19 - 21** - British forces burn Lewiston, Youngstown and Manchester (Niagara Falls), New York

**December 22** - British take Fort Schlosser

**December 29 - 31** - British forces burn Buffalo and Black Rock

## **1814**

**May 23 to June 21** - Treason Trials underway in Ancaster, Upper Canada



**July 3** - American forces under Maj.-Gen. Jacob Brown invade Upper Canada and capture Fort Erie

**July 5** - Battle of Chippawa, Upper Canada

**July 18** - American forces burn the hamlet of St David's, Upper Canada

**July 20** - Eight of the Traitors found guilty at the Ancaster Assizes are hanged on Burlington Heights

**July 23** - British 104th under Lieut.-Gen. Gordon Drummond arrive at Twelve Mile Creek from Town of York

**July 25** - Battle of Lundy's Lane, (Niagara Falls), Upper Canada

**July 26** - American forces burn Bridgewater Mills (Burch's Mills, above Niagara Falls), Upper Canada

**August 3** - British forces cross Niagara River and engage American forces at Conjocta Creek/Black Rock, New York and are repulsed, returning to Upper Canada

**August 4** - British forces under Lieut.-Gen. Drummond begin the siege of Fort Erie; the casualties of this siege result in Fort Erie becoming the bloodiest battlefield in Canada

**August 12** - *USS Somers* and *USS Ohio* captured in Lake Erie/Niagara River off Fort Erie

**August 14** - British assault on Snake Hill Battery (Fort Erie), Upper Canada

**August 15** - British under Lieut.-Gen. Drummond fail in assault on Fort Erie

**August 25** - British forces burn Washington, D.C.

**September 17** - American forces from Fort Erie launch a successful sortie against Drummond's batteries

**September 21** - British forces end siege of Fort Erie and retreat to Chippawa

**October 15** - Skirmish at Chippawa

**October 19** - Battle of Cook's Mills (near Welland) on Lyons Creek, Upper Canada

**November 5** - American forces evacuate Fort Erie, destroy what remains of fort and return to Buffalo

**November 15** - British re-occupy Fort Erie after American withdrawal

**December 24** - Treaty of Ghent (Belgium) signed to end the War of 1812

## **1815**

**February 16** – U.S. Senate approves Treaty of Ghent; 17th President Madison ratifies Treaty and it is proclaimed on 18th. War of 1812 officially ends

**May 22** - American forces re-occupy Fort Niagara

## Looking back... with Alun Hughes

### “HISTORY THAT ISN’T SO”

My title is a chapter heading from *Studies of the Niagara Frontier*, published in 1911 by the Buffalo Historical Society. In it author Frank H. Severance bemoans the errors that so often lurk in written history, errors that are heedlessly repeated by other writers who can’t be bothered to check the facts. Using Niagara Falls as an example, he cites many instances of “history that isn’t so,” and observes gloomily, “The spread of misinformation about Niagara began ... as soon as men began to write about the region, The first man usually means the first lie.”

Of course, Severance did not mean that historical errors only result from outright lying, but like the early writers who were the object of his criticism (and who never hesitated to bend the truth if it made for a better story), he may have felt that a bit of exaggeration was justified to get his point across.

I have to admit a lot of sympathy for Severance, for I too am a stickler when it comes to historical accuracy. Indeed, if you read Doug Herod’s column in *The Standard* on January 23 you will know that I am nothing less than a “fusspot,” and a “proud fusspot” at that. The topic of his column was the name of the bridge on DeCew Road just east of the DeCew House. Ontario Power Generation is transferring ownership to the City of Thorold, and for some reason the official documents refer to it as the Laura Secord Bridge.

When I first read this the fusspot in me took over and wrote a letter to *The Standard*, pointing out that the name made no sense. Laura Secord never went that way (she approached the DeCew House from the opposite direction), and even if she had there would have been no bridge, for the water channel beneath it was not created until about 1904.

There are enough historical errors floating around already without creating new ones, and I never cease to be amazed at how many there are (and how rapidly they proliferate and mutate now that we have the Internet). Since becoming a serious student of local history about a dozen years ago I have researched numerous topics, and have learned the hard way that I can never rely on secondary sources, no matter how authoritative they seem to be. I could devote a whole article to errors that I have come across, but two examples will suffice for now.

One is the claim that John Graves Simcoe, on his arrival in Niagara in 1792, changed the name from Niagara to Newark, and the other is the claim that the earliest settlers of St. Catharines in the 1780s were John Hainer and Jacob Dittrick. The first is

simply wrong, and the second is attended by so many qualifications, so many ifs and buts, as to be almost meaningless. (Regretfully, lack of space prevents me from discussing these any further, so I can only seek your forbearance as I move on.)

This is why, when doing my research, I not only use primary documentation whenever possible but also take full advantage of the knowledge of local historians such as Alex Ormston and John Burtniak. Both are amazing sources of information, references, suggestions and leads. John in particular plays a major role behind the scenes, meticulously editing successive drafts of my articles for content and style. Between us, we usually get things right.

Yet, despite all these precautions, errors do creep in (and if I am upset by historical errors in general, you can imagine how bad I feel about those I commit myself). Sometimes they are errors of commission, when I misinterpret the data or express myself unclearly, and sometimes they are errors of omission, when I fail to realise the significance of some piece of evidence or when relevant documents fail to arrive before the publication deadline. I flatter myself that the errors are rare and relatively minor, but there are a couple of recent exceptions that I must confess to.

The first, an error of commission, is in my September 2008 article on the evolution of St. Catharines as a municipality. The 1850 act that redefined the town limits did not extend the northern boundary all the way to Carlton Street as I stated, but only to a line midway between Welland Avenue and Carlton. I misread the boundary description in the act, though in my defence I should add that I was led astray by an error in the act itself (which is really ironic since the act was passed to correct errors in the previous act of 1849).

The second, an error of omission, is in my most recent article about Power Glen. A complete episode in the area’s history is missing — the story of the Grantham Navigation Company, incorporated in 1838 to canalize the Twelve Mile Creek from St. Catharines to the Escarpment. While it never came to anything, it does serve to clarify questions of mill ownership in the 1830s. Had I twigged to something Alex Ormston was saying this would have been in the article, but I failed to make the connection.

Suitably chagrined, I am working on expanded and corrected versions of both articles, and in due course I will provide copies to anyone interested.

Copyright © 2009 by Alun Hughes