

Historical Society of St. Catharines

# NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 1994

P.O. Box 24123, 80 King St., St. Catharines, ON L2R 7P7

905/682-6053

## **THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S 1994-95 SPEAKERS SERIES:**

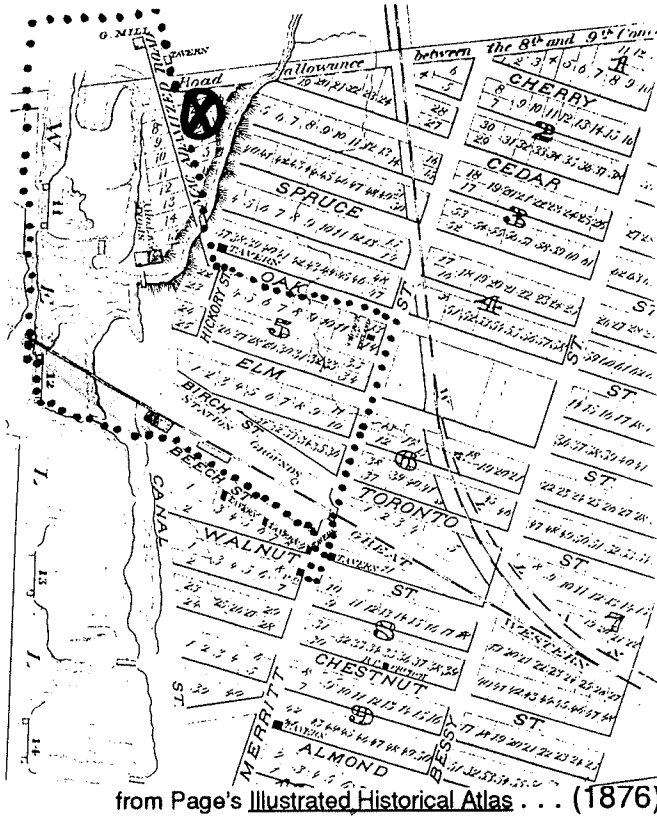
Here is the list of the presentations to be given before the Historical Society during our 1994-1995 program year. Take a look -- we're pretty sure that you will find something here that will be of interest to you. As usual, the talks will take place at our regular first-Thursday-of-the-month meetings, at 7:30 p.m., in the Mills Room of the St. Catharines Public Library. Spread the word to people with an interest in the history of St. Catharines and Niagara!

- October 6: **Lt.-Col. Ian Purdie** will talk about **the history of the Lincoln and Welland Regiment** in this, the Regiment's bicentennial year;
- November 3: **John Burtiak**, Brock University Special Collections Director, will lead us on a **"Walk Through Old St. Catharines,"** featuring slides of material from his fabulous post card collection.
- December 1: **Ron Dale**, Superintendent of the Fort George National Historic Site, Niagara-on-the-Lake, will talk about **"Merritt at War: William Hamilton Merritt and the War of 1812,"** reviewing the military exploits of the man who later founded the Welland Canal;
- January 5: **Gerry Ouderkirk** will talk about **19th century St. Catharines shipbuilder Melancthon Simpson;**
- February 2: **Owen Thomas**, historian, York University, will discuss **the history of blacks in St. Catharines and Niagara;**
- March 2: **Peter John Stokes**, nationally known heritage restoration consultant, will discuss **the architectural heritage of St. Catharines;**
- April 6: **Howard Engel**, St. Catharines' renowned mystery writer, creator of the Benny Cooperman mystery novels set in the fictional town of Grantham, will address the Society's Annual General Meeting (topic to be announced);
- May 4: **Carmela Patrias**, professor of history at Brock University, will talk about the history of labour and immigration in St. Catharines.

# WALKING TOUR OF MERRITTON:

## MERRITTON

SCALE 500 FT TO 1 IN



from Page's Illustrated Historical Atlas . . . (1876)

On Thanksgiving weekend, the Historical Society will have one of its occasional special outdoor events. In the fall of 1992 we toured Port Dalhousie; in June 1993 we toured part of Victoria Lawn Cemetery. Now we are about to tour a part of St. Catharines that has thus far been neglected in our walks as well as those sponsored by St. Catharines L.A.C.A.C. Merritton's turn has finally come!

On Sunday, October 9, St. Catharines Museum curator Arden Phair will lead a walking tour of the north end of Merritton. The walk will form a loop (see the dotted line on the map to the left), taking us through some industrial and canal-related areas and ultimately back to our starting point. We'll begin at the corner of Oakdale Avenue and Abbot Street, across from the recently burned-out Niagara Recycling centre.

We'll go a short distance north on Oakdale, then over to the long-abandoned Second Canal, then southward along the Canal toward the heart of Merritton, the old Merritton Town Hall and the Merritton Library. Then we will go north once more along Merritt Street to Oakdale, and thence back to our starting point.

The walk should take between 90 minutes and two hours. A recent walk of the course showed us that it is not for the frail or faint of heart, especially the section that takes us along a railway line between the Canal and Merritt Street. **PARTICIPANTS SHOULD WEAR STURDY, COMFORTABLE WALKING SHOES.** The walk will be free of charge and open to anyone, Society member or not. Meet us at 2:00 p.m. at the corner of Oakdale and Abbot Street in Merritton. See you then?

G. T. R. Station, Merritton, Canada



## **THE 1994 NIAGARA PENINSULA HISTORY CONFERENCE:**

Let's see . . . the time has come for the kids to go back to school . . . we've just closed up the cottage for the year . . . the football season is in full swing and the hockey season is about to start -- that must mean that it's time again for another autumnal ritual to take place -- the Niagara Peninsula History Conference at Brock University!

Right you are! We have had this important annual event for sixteen years now . This year the theme of the conference (to take place at Brock University on September 24 and 25) is "Peace and Good Government in the Niagara Peninsula" It is fascinating to contemplate that the first European settlers who came here found themselves in a wilderness thinly populated by people of the First Nations. It was the settlers' job to build a new society here from the ground up, trying to transplant to North America the seeds of the kind of civilization they had known back in the mother country. It was that pioneering effort that inspired the theme of this year's conference. Saturday the 24th will be filled (9:00 a.m. to 4:15 p.m.) with papers on such topics as "The beginnings of local government in Niagara," "Networking from Niagara until 1820," "The early peace churches and groups in Niagara," "The Niagara District's education experiment, 1841-1849," "Crime in Hamilton, 1860-1970," and "Regional government and planning since the 1960s."

The annual conference banquet (6:30 p.m. Saturday evening) will feature James A. Gibson, president emeritus, Brock University, talking about "The 'Firebrand', Navy Island, and the United Nations." At 8:30 a.m. on Sunday the 25th there will be a field trip to explore some of the significant sites and buildings in the Peninsula relating to the conference theme.

As always, the conference will be a rich experience for persons interested in the history of Niagara -- interesting papers to hear, a good place to meet other people who share our interest in local history, a chance to get out and visit historic sites all over the Peninsula. Let us repeat the same warning we issued last year: if you would like to attend, make a reservation NOW. Call Wes Turner at 688-5550, x3505, or John Burtiak at 688-5550, x3264.

## **THE HISTORY CONFERENCE -- A SUGGESTION:**

The following letter was sent earlier this year to the organizers of the Niagara Peninsula History Conference:

April 14, 1994

For many years, the Norfolk Historical Society has held its annual genealogical fair ("Norfolklore") the last weekend of September. This event is greatly anticipated

by family historians. The Norfolk gathering this year will be September 24, 1994.

We understand that for the second year many of us will not be able to attend the Brock history conference because it is scheduled for that same weekend. Some familiarity with history plays an important part in family research, and the knowledge and enjoyment gained from the Brock history conference is outstanding. Many of our members are very disappointed that they will not be able to attend again this year.

I am sure that the dates for 1994 are etched in stone, but the Niagara Peninsula Branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society would urge you to consider another date in future years. I am sure the additional attendance would aid in the success of the conference.

Sincerely yours,

Marilyn Jackson, Chairman,  
Niagara Peninsula Branch, Ontario Genealogical Society

A footnote to Marilyn Jackson's letter:

For the past two years at least the Brock History Conference has also fallen on the same weekend as the Grape and Wine Festival Parade. So, a suggestion for the Conference organizers: if on this coming Saturday morning, at the opening of the 1994 Conference, the number of persons in the audience seems to be a smaller than you'd like, just think of the 15 or so members of the local O.G.S. branch who would like to have attended but will instead be whizzing along the highway toward their meeting in Norfolk County. Think also of the 10 or 20 other potential attendees who may be off at the Grape Festival Parade. Would it be wise in future to avoid having the Conference conflict with those other two popular events?

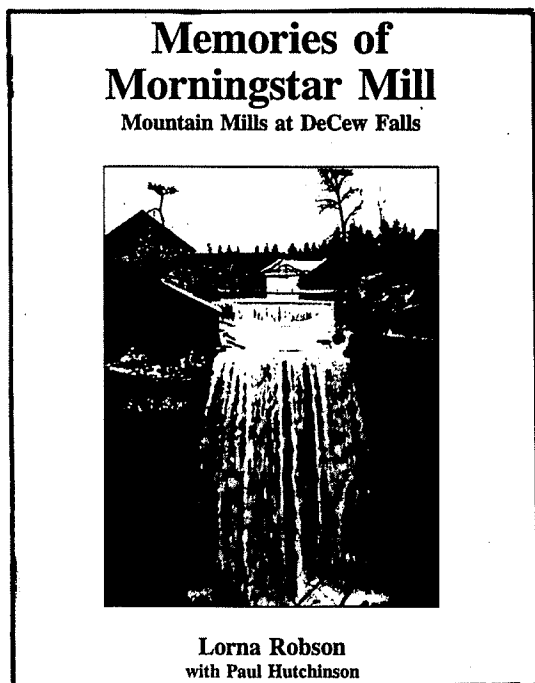
(This is strictly one man's opinion and does NOT purport to express the opinion of the Historical Society of St. Catharines or of its executive board.)



## **THE 1995 HISTORICAL SOCIETY CALENDAR:**

Yes, there WILL BE a second annual Historical Society Calendar! Work is in process right now, and we hope that we can have the calendar available for sale in time for our first meeting of this year, Thursday, October 6. If we miss that date, the calendars will be available at our November and December public meetings.

## MEMORIES OF MORNINGSTAR MILL:



A special person has written a special book about a special place -- and it's selling like the proverbial hotcakes!

Lorna Robson, for many years the Society's secretary, has written a 52 page book (with the encouragement and technical assistance of Society member Paul Hutchinson) of her recollections of life out at Morningstar Mill at DeCew Falls. The book combines Lorna's memories of life with her beloved grandfather, Wilson Morningstar (1854-1933), as he ran the mill, and photos from their family album to illustrate her narrative -- photos of Grandfather Morningstar at work in the mill, of Lorna and her late brother Don growing up there, of the nearby school they attended. There is even an interesting chapter on the continuing fascination the mill has had for artists.

The Standard did a feature article on the book just prior to its launching, which took place out at the Mill (appropriately enough!) on the weekend of the Grist and Chopping Show there. While many persons came to the show, saw the signs for the new book

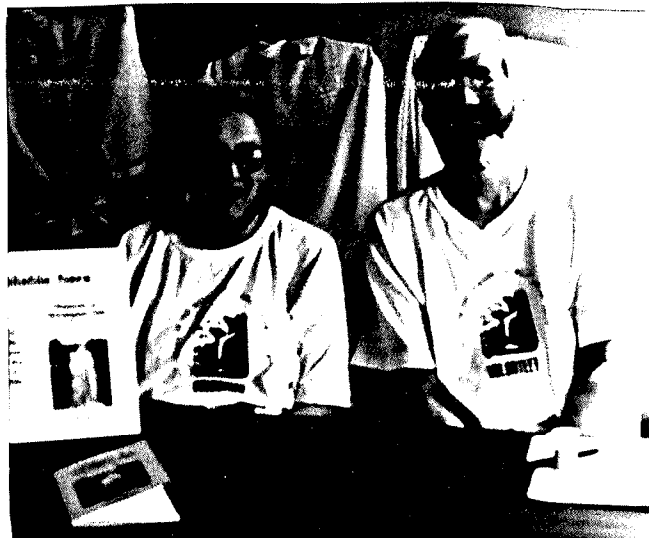


Photo courtesy of Greg Miller

**Lorna Robson and Paul Hutchinson take time out from autographing their new book.**

about the Mill, and decided they just had to have a copy, many others had seen the Standard article and showed up specifically to buy the book and have Lorna autograph it for them. More than once people arrived at the gate to the grounds and simply said: "Where's the book?" By the time the weekend had ended, the book had SOLD OUT!

What about those of you who may just now be hearing about the book for the first time? Do not despair! Not many weeks after the first 200 copies were sold a further 200 copies were printed. So, if you want to have a copy right this moment, just give Paul Hutchinson a call at 227-2699. If you can wait a couple of weeks there will be a stack of

them available at the Historical Society's first 1994-95 meeting, October 6th.

## **TWO OLD PHOTO ALBUMS:**

On the weekend of August 6-7, we went out to the annual Grist and Chopping Show at Morningstar Mill. We set up a card table under a tree near the entrance, filled the table with Historical Society books and newsletters, and set the Society's new sign next to it. It seemed like a great chance to introduce the Historical Society to a crowd of people interested in local history.

We had a great time! We had a pleasant surprise when a man walked up to our table, extended his hand, and said "I used to be president of your society!" (It was David Plumb, Society president back in 1967-68.) There was also the pleasure of watching Lorna Robson's new book being snatched up by eager buyers (see above, page 5). But the most exciting thing that happened was our encounter with John Wilson of Thorold. About mid-day on Saturday, John walked up to our table and said "You're with the Historical Society? I've got some photo albums you might like to look at."



**The Wilson Blacksmith Shop, Homer, ca. 1902**

Courtesy John Wilson

And indeed he did! He came back the next day bearing two albums full of old photos of people and places in and around St. Catharines. The albums had been passed from generation to generation in the Wilson family, and are now owned by a cousin in Guelph. She had no idea who or what the photos showed. But as soon as John Wilson saw them recently he recognised many of them -- the scenes in and around the Wilson

blacksmith shop in Homer, views of downtown St. Catharines after a blizzard, interior views of the photo studio where a young member of the family worked, and interesting views of people inside playing the mandolin or the piano, or outside picnicking or bicycling or having carriage rides. How old are the photos? One view of the photo studio helpfully included a wall calendar, turned to March 1902.



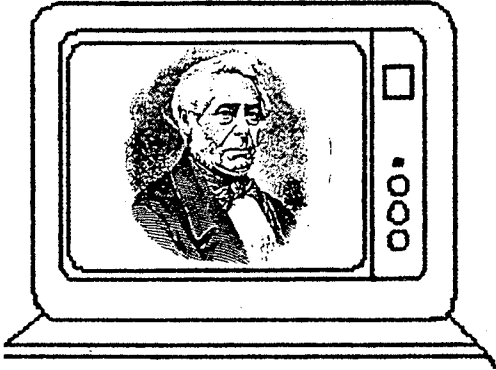
Courtesy John Wilson

### **Edwin Poole's Photo Studio, St. Paul Street, March 1902**

As noted above, they included eight or ten views of the interior of a photographer's studio and waiting rooms. These views in and of themselves would be interesting for what they show of the cameras then in use, the photographic supplies on display, even just the furniture styles of the time. But which local photographer did the young man work for? One researcher reviewed turn-of-the-century city directories in search of photographer John Wilson, the young man who appears in some of the photo studio views. An initial look under "photographers" in the classified section of the city directories revealed no Wilsons. But in the alphabetical listings in the 1904 directory was the following entry: "Jno. W. Wilson, asst E. Poole, Homer."

Bingo! Young Mr. Wilson worked for Edwin Poole, probably the single greatest name in the history of photography in St. Catharines, the dominant force in the field from 1875 to at least 1910, the one whom people usually turned to when publishing volumes of photos of the Garden City (e.g., the Toronto Globe in 1892, the Board of Trade publications in 1900, 1904, and 1907)! So we unexpectedly get a little peek behind the scenes at the working life of Edwin Poole, St. Catharines' photographer extraordinaire -- a special treat hidden inside those two old photo albums!

## NIAGARA HISTORY COMES TO TELEVISION:



Over the years there have been very few television shows that have featured our local heritage. Back in the mid-1980s Stan Brickell, then a city councillor, now a member of regional council, had a heritage-oriented show. Over the last decade or so Keith Dewar of Thorold has done the occasional heritage-related documentary -- one on Thorold heritage, another on Laura Secord and the battle of Beaver Dams, and a third on Morningstar Mill.

The latest entrant on the scene of heritage television is This Week in History, which debuted on Maclean-Hunter cable channel 10 on Thursday, September 15. It is the creation of Niagara Falls' Bob Foley, whom many readers will recognize as the writer of the "Niagara Story" series that for the past several years has appeared each Saturday in the "Weekender" section of the St. Catharines Standard.

Bob's venture into television will consist of one show each month devoted to some aspect of the history of Niagara. The first show in the series, "The Battle of Chippawa," was taped on site at the Chippawa battlefield and at Fort George in Niagara-on-the-Lake. In it Peter Alexander of Fort George demonstrates how to load and fire both a "Brown Bess" musket and a brass six pound cannon, and Col. Ron Yorke of the Chippawa Battlefield Preservation Society talks about that organization's efforts to protect the battlefield from development.

Bob has got his entire season from now to June mapped out. Month by month they are as follows: October: "The Battle of Queenston Heights," with author Bob Malcomson as guest; November: "The Militia: Canada's Citizen Soldiers," with Col. Ron Yorke as guest; December: "Niagara's First Inhabitants: the Mystery of the Neutrals;" January: "The Burning of Newark and the Capture of Fort Niagara," with guests David Webb of Fort George and Brian Dunnigan of Fort Niagara; February: "The Niagara Ice Bridge;" March: "The Niagara Heritage Showcase;" April: "Morningstar Mill;" May: "The Mackenzie Printery Museum;" and June: "The Welland Canal."

Those shows, each a half hour in length, will be telecast **each Thursday night at 6:30 p.m. on cable channel 10**. Since there is only one new show each month, each episode is telecast four times, which gives viewers the maximum chance to catch each one.

In addition to those monthly telecasts, Bob is also planning two special town hall meeting telecasts: in February the subject will be "Saving Canadian Heritage -- Who's Responsible?", and in June, "The Welland Canals Parkway -- Project or Pipedream?" That's a good lineup of shows, full of material that ought to be of interest to Historical Society members.



## UPCOMING HERITAGE EVENTS:

(\*\*\*\*\* = Historical Society events)

**September 24 (Saturday), 10:00-4:00pm:**

Annual **Norfolklore genealogical gathering** at the Eva Brook Donly Museum, Simcoe, Ontario. Admission: \$4.00 (684-7618).

**September 24-25 (Saturday and Sunday), 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.:**

The 16th annual **Niagara Peninsula History Conference, Brock University** will feature "**Peace and Good Government in the Niagara Peninsula**"; papers on that subject on Saturday; conference dinner on Saturday night, and a bus tour of related sites at Sunday. (For details, see above, page 3.) To reserve tickets, call Wes Turner at 688-5550, x3505.

**September 26 (Monday):**

"**From Shells to Loonies: Canada's Currency**", a display tracing the history of currency in Canada from the wampum of the aboriginal peoples to the one-dollar loonies introduced in 1987. Includes more than 100 items. **St. Catharines Museum** at Lock 3 (984-8880). (Until November 6);

A continuing display in honour of the **Lincoln and Welland Regiment**, celebrating its bicentennial this year. Lobby display cases at the St. Catharines Museum feature artifacts on loan from the Regiment. At the **St. Catharines Museum** at Lock 3 (984-8880). (Until October 30.)

**October 1 (Saturday):**

**10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.:**

**Heritage Building open house, Niagara Falls.** Five structures, including Oak Hall and Stamford Village Cottage, will be open to visitors. Cost: \$10 -- a benefit for the Niagara Regional LACAC Association. For tickets and further information, call 682-6053.)

**9:30-3:00 p.m.:**

**Carl Dair Symposium:** five papers on Welland printer Carl Dair, the art of printing, and publishing in Welland, a round table discussion on same, a visit to the Mackenzie Heritage Printery, and lunch as well. At the Queenston Heights Restaurant. (688-5550, x3264)

**October 2 (Sunday), 2:00 p.m.:**

A **walking tour of Thorold's Lakeview Cemetery**, led by Fred Campbell, local historian and former superintendent of that cemetery. Meet in the old section of the cemetery, reached via the cemetery entrance on Town Line Road. Duration: one hour (682-6053).

**\*\*\*\*\*October 6 (Thursday), 7:30 p.m.:**

**Lt.-Col. Ian Purdie** addresses the Historical Society about the history of the Lincoln and Welland Regiment. Mills Room, St. Catharines Public Library.

**\*\*\*\*\*October 9 (Sunday), 2:00 p.m.:**

**Arden Phair** leads a walking tour of Merritton, sponsored by the Historical Society of St. Catharines. (See above, page 2, for details.) Meet at the parking lot at the corner of Oakdale Avenue and Abbot St., Merritton. Comfortable, sturdy walking shoes recommended. No charge. (682-6053).

**October 15 (Saturday):**

**9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.:**

The Thorold and Beaverdams Historical Society sponsors an **open house tour**

of six Thorold churches -- 3 the morning, 3 in the afternoon. Free. Meet at St. John's Anglican Church, Claremont and Carleton St. S., Thorold. (682-6053)

1:00 p.m.:

A walking tour of the Queenston Heights battlefield, in honour of the anniversary of the 1813 battle where General Brock lost his life. The walk will be led by author Bob Malcomson, soon to publish a book on the battle. There will also be military demonstrations by a unit of soldiers from Fort George under the command of David Webb. Meet at the base of the Brock Monument. Free. Duration: ca. 2 hours (682-6053).

\*\*\*\*\*November 3 (Thursday); 7:30 p.m.:

The Historical Society

be announced. Mills Room, St. Catharines Public Library. Free. (682-6053)

Speaker to

November 28 (Monday), 10:00 a.m.:

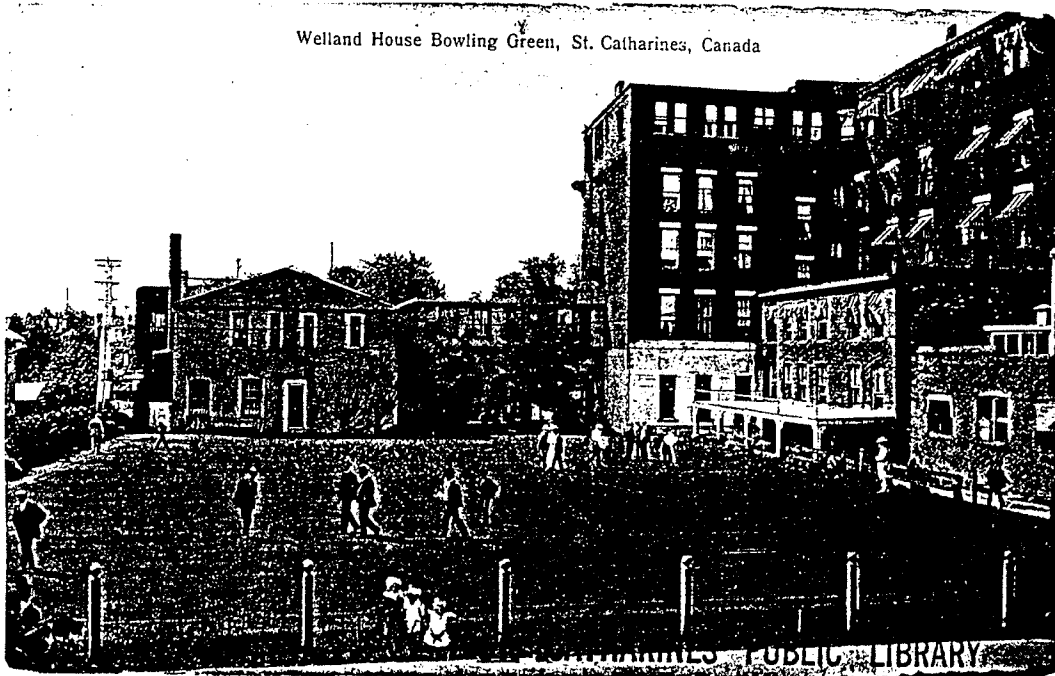
William Hamilton Merritt Day, the annual observance of the anniversary of the passage of the first ships through the newly-opened Welland Canal back in 1829. "Mr. Merritt" will be present to say a few words to the assembled crowd. At the St. Catharines Museum at Lock 3. Sponsored by the Welland Canals Foundation. (682-7203).

\*\*\*\*\*December 1 (Thursday), 7:30 p.m.

Ron Dale of Fort George talks to the Historical Society about "Merritt at War: William Hamilton Merritt and the war of 1812." Mills Room, St. Catharines Public Library. Free. (682-6053)

December 3 (Saturday), 6:30 p.m.

The annual Friends of Fort George candlelight dinner. This annual event, featuring a fine meal as well as entertainment with a heritage emphasis, will take place at Navy Hall, Niagara-on-the-Lake (468-7681).



Special Collections Room, St. Catharines Public Library

**A nice game of bowls as the summer winds down. (Could there really have been a bowling green right behind the old Welland House in the heart of downtown St. Catharines?)**