

The St. Catharines Historical Society **NEWSLETTER**

P.O. Box 23104, 124 Welland Ave., St. Catharines, ON L2R 7P6 905/682-6053 FEBRUARY 1997

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S AUTUMN SEASON

200 Years of Art in St. Catharines:



In the picture to the left, Rodman Hall Curator David Aurandt leans on the podium at Rodman Hall during his November 7 talk to the Historical Society. In that, the second of this fall's ventures outside of our usual St. Catharines Public Library meeting place, the turnout was very good and the reaction to Mr. Aurandt's talk was very positive.

We understand that Rodman Hall was quite pleased with the attendance figures racked up by the art exhibit itself during its two-and-a-half month run at the Art Centre. In his talk, Mr. Aurandt also mentioned that in the course of preparing "Two Hundred Years of Art in St. Catharines" he had been inspired with ideas for several related exhibits. That is good news, the results of which we keenly anticipate.

A History of the St. Catharines Armory:

Our October meeting featured former Historical Society vice president and executive member Lt.-Col. Clifford Baker talking about the history of the St. Catharines Armory. The audience enjoyed Cliff's detailed, well-illustrated history of the building, based on his painstaking research which uncovered much information new to the local historical community. The fact that Cliff's talk was given at the Armory was welcomed by many in the audience who thereby had a chance to see parts of the Armory's interior that they had never before seen. Further good news is Cliff's i will be perpetuated by the publication of his paper, complete with illustrations, an event expected to take place sometime in spring 1997. Those of you would like to have a copy of Cliff's Armory talk should drop him a line at 33 Dalemere Cr., St. Catharines, ON L2N 7K2.

OUR TRIP TO HAMILTON



Photo courtesy of Dennis Gannon

The group above are gathered in front of a re-enactor in the kitchen of the Gage House, located on the Stoney Creek Battlefield just west of Hamilton. The woman is describing how and what she would have cooked for her household, ca. 1835, the period of Canadian life that is depicted in the Gage House. This was one of many interesting experiences we had during our November 23rd trip to Hamilton. This, our second consecutive November trip to Hamilton, drew more than twice as many persons as last year's, and most of them were NOT Society members.

Our planned visits to Dundurn Castle and the Museum and battlefield at Stoney Creek went off pretty much as planned, with Dundurn looking particularly lovely, all decorated for Christmas. At the last minute we were unable to visit the Military Museum on the grounds of Dundurn Castle -- it turned out to be too small to accommodate our entire bus load of people all at one time! Result: we had to skip that museum and instead extended our stay at the Royal Botanical Gardens Centre, originally planned just to be a lunch stop.

The next obvious question is: what's next? During lunch participants were heard to discuss how nice a bus trip to Toronto would be -- perhaps to visit the grand homes at Casa Loma or nearby Spadina, or to visit the Canadiana rooms at the Royal Ontario Museum. Others nominated Buffalo, recalling that it is a distinguished old town, with a park system by Frederick Law Olmsted, numerous interesting old churches, and a series of buildings by Frank Lloyd Wright and other distinguished architects. Or how about going back to Hamilton and vicinity once again next year, with visits to the Brant Museum in Burlington and the Steam Technology Museum in Hamilton in the morning and the Airplane Heritage Museum outside Hamilton in the afternoon?

What do you think? Where would YOU like to go on the Society's 1997 bus trip?

CONSTITUTION MAKING



Confederation, Charlottetown, 1867

January 1997

Dear fellow members,

Would it surprise you to learn that a group of Canadians met to discuss a constitution and actually reached some decisions instead of calling for a series of future conferences? That is what happened in the first week of December in Centennial Library in St. Catharines.

In the business meeting on December 5th, we examined the revised constitution. We spent a good half hour discussing the changes from the old constitution and several members raised important questions. As well, two amendments to clarify By-Law 9 were proposed and accepted. The most noticeable difference in this new constitution is the change of name to St. Catharines Historical Society. Copies of the constitution will be made available at future meetings for any members who want to have one.

On behalf of the executive I want to thank all those members who came early to take part in the discussion. I also want to add my personal appreciation for the contributions made by the executive and by members of the Society to the work of revising the constitution.

Under this constitution, the membership year now runs from January 1st to December 31st. Renewals for 1997 will be only \$6 and new memberships will be \$10, payable by April 1st.

Remember our next meeting on 6 February 1997. In closing, let me wish you all a healthy and prosperous New Year.

Wesley B. Turner

President, St. Catharines Historical Society

ST. CATHARINES' "NEGRO VILLAGE," 1853



Samuel Ringgold Ward

Samuel Ringgold Ward was the founding editor of the *Provincial Freeman*, the first and most successful of 19th century black-run newspapers in Canada. In early January 1853 he undertook a tour of six weeks' length that took him to Hamilton, St. Catharines, Niagara-on-the-Lake), London, Chatham, and Buxton, a small black settlement near Chatham.

His report on his visit to St. Catharines begins with his acknowledgement that he feels both "curious" and "anxious" to be there. In so doing he is referring back to an incident that would still have been vivid in the memories of

his readers, and certainly of those he visited here -- a shocking race riot that had taken place in June of the previous year, in which, according to one report, "much of the Negro Village was burnt to the ground." That event would not only have been vivid in the memories of his hosts in St. Catharines, but it continued to be an irritant since no restitution had yet been made to the Black population.

On the whole Ringgold's reaction to the treatment and status of Blacks in St. Catharines might be characterized as "pleasantly surprised." Herewith, Mr. Ringgold's report on the situation of blacks in St. Catharines, early 1853 (printed in the March 24, 1853, issue of the *Provincial Freeman*)

On the 11th of January last we started upon a tour of some six weeks time, and some 565 miles travel, in the western and frontier districts.

At Hamilton, on the 11th of January, we found a protracted meeting in progress, under the charge of Elders Hawkins and Brown, aided by Elder Garrett. This was in the colored Baptist Church. Arriving at St. Catharines on the 12th, we were a little curious, not to say anxious, to see for oneself what is the state of negro hate in that town. We stopped at the St. Catharines House, and found that the servants, landlord, and all others, were both polite and kind.

At the invitation of the Rev. Hiram Wilson, whose guest we had the pleasure to be, we attended a temperance meeting, addressed by the eloquent Elder Ryerson, of the Baptist Church. After Mr. R. Had finished his very able discourse, we were invited to say a few words, which we

consented to do, though our awkwardness, in contrast with our predecessor, must have been apparent to all.

On the 13th, Brother Wilson introduced us to Hon. Mr. H. Meritt [sic], His Worship the Mayor, Mr. Adams, of the Custom House, and several other gentlemen of prominence. We lectured, that evening, in the Town Hall, to a large audience, who seemed to evince a good degree of interest in our cause, enough, at any rate, to request us, by a unanimous vote, to speak again the next evening. The meeting of the 14th was also a large one, and, at the close, a vote of thanks was offered us by Rev. Mr. Ryerson, and carried unanimously. In company with our excellent friend, Wilson, we went to Niagara on the 15th, where, through the activity of William Barr, Sen., Esq., a large assemblage was ready to hear us at the appointed hour. Mr. Barr occupied the chair with great ability. A most encouraging meeting was that at Niagara. Returning the same night to St. Catharines, we accepted the invitation of Rev. Mr. Cooke, of the American Presbyterian Church, to preach for him. We spoke, the same day, in the two colored churches, Rev. Mr. Helmseley's and the Baptist.



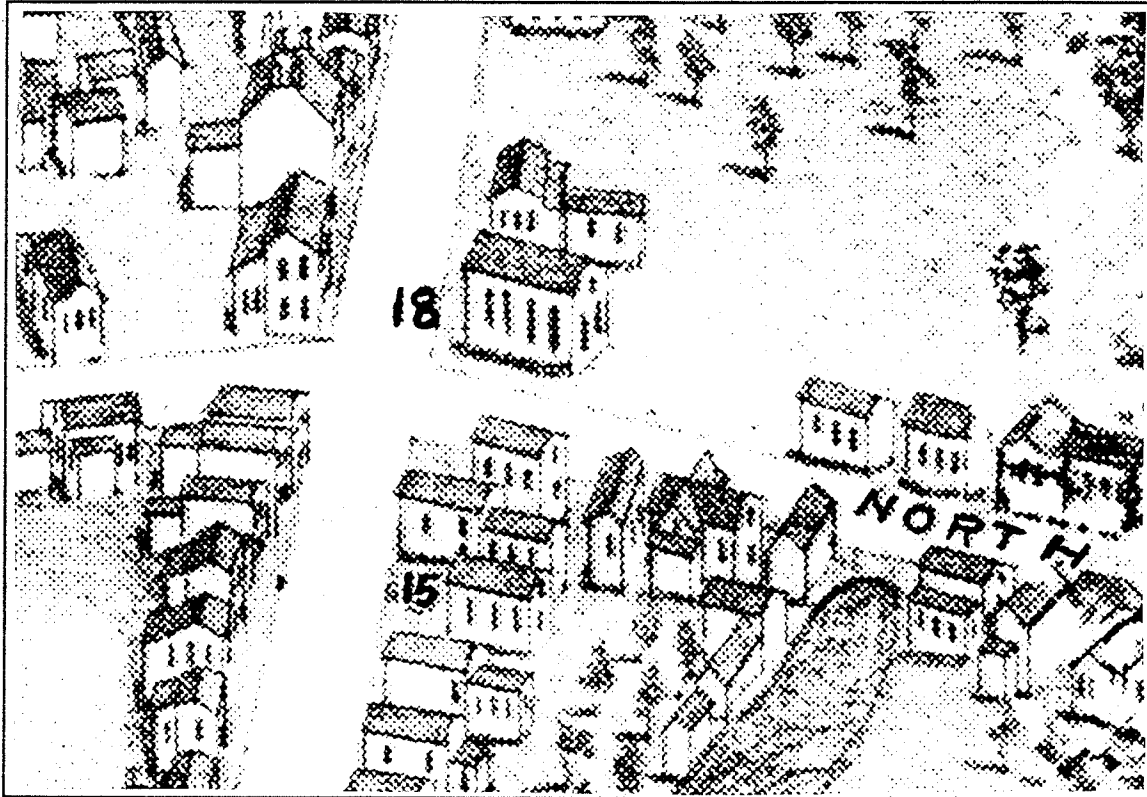
Another successful Black entrepreneur

Barber Thomas P. Casey

J. W. Lindsey and Mr. James Harris live as comfortably as any one needs to live. Each of them has a good team, and they are making as rapid progress, in worldly weal, as the majority of their white fellow-subjects. As much may be said of Mr. J.W. Taylor and others, on whom we did not have time to call.

We must confess that we found things better in St. Catharines than we had feared. The prejudice against our people, was not so strong, so prevalent nor so unprovoked as we had thought, from what we had heard. Personally, we were treated by persons of all classes as well as we ever were, anywhere. Our people in St. Catharines are not the poorest in the town, by a good deal. Many of them own little houses and lots, and enjoy a comfortable maintenance. Mr.

The 'Negro Village,' of which so much has been said, we expected to find in a swamp or a mud-hole. But the set-



From Brosius' Bird's-Eye View of St. Catharines, 1875

The "Negro Village" twenty years after Ringgold's 1853 visit. The street running from the bottom to the top of the drawing is Geneva Street. Two of the "Negro Village's" most important buildings were: #18, the British Methodist Episcopal Church, then, as now, at the northeast corner of Geneva and North streets; and #15, the Zion Baptist Church (demolished in the late 1950s).

lement, if such it may be called, is on a street [North St.] running parallel with the main street¹, and within one hundred rods of it. The site is good, the property valuable, the part of the town respectable, and whites live in the most immediate vicinity of it. Some foolish actions of our people have given occasion for some prejudice, and there are too many who would rather cringe than contend for what law and right entitle them to. It is true too, that there are some natives of the U.S.A. there, who act the part of fools and knaves towards our people. Having aided in trampling Negroes under foot at home, they seek to engraft their pro-slavery negro hate upon British stock. It is also true, that they now and then find a Canadian soft sapling that will bear inoculation; but we are quite convinced that when our people shall have done all they ought to do, in St. Catharines, towards their own elevation, the whites will be right enough. . . .

¹ He may be referring to Church Street.

He closed his report on his tour with the following remarks:

Our tour satisfied us abundantly that the colored people of Canada are progressing more rapidly than our people in the States -- that the liberty enjoyed here makes different men of those once crushed and dispirited in the land of chains -- that along with the other poor classes who come here, and improve themselves in wealth and status, the black people will also arise, in some cases, very rapidly, but generally slowly, though surely -- that the day is not far distant when we shall put to shame the selfish, systematic charity seekers who go to the States, and some of them to the South, to beg, partly for fugitives, but chiefly for their own pockets . . ."

NOTE: at the Historical Society's next meeting historian Nancy Butler will tell the stories of three escaped slaves who reached St. Catharines via the Underground Railroad and then found success as entrepreneurs here -- a blacksmith, a barber, and a teamster. Included are two of the persons mentioned in the article above. That talk will take place in the Mills Room of the St. Catharines Public Library at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, February 6.

"CIVIC, SIMCOE OR COLONEL BY?"

The following article by Tom MacGregor first appeared in the *Legion* magazine's September 1996 issue. This article implicitly raises a question for us here in Niagara: do we want to find a more meaningful name for August's "Civic Holiday"? If you have suggestions, send them to the Society.

For years, the province has enjoyed a statutory holiday on the first Monday of August -- known rather dully as the Civic Holiday. . . .

A few years ago, Toronto started calling the holiday Simcoe Day, in honor of Lieutenant-Colonel John Graves Simcoe, the British army officer who in 1792 founded York -- the original name of Toronto -- and became the first lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada. Simcoe was commander of the Queen's Rangers during the American Revolution, and was noted for championing British institutions and making slavery illegal. The name caught on in Toronto and recently there has been pressure on Queen's Park to declare Simcoe Day provincewide.

That didn't sit well with Ottawa Mayor Jacquelin Holzman, who responded last year by declaring the August holiday Colonel By Day. It was so named in honor of Lt.-Col. John By of the Royal Engineers who founded Ottawa's precursor, Bytown, while overseeing the construction of the Rideau Canal in 1826-32. The idea found favor with the Historical Society of Ottawa and this year a bylaw was passed by city council to name the holiday Col. By Day every year.

SHORT NOTES

The Society Gets Another Grant from the Province:

The Society is proud to announce that it has received a grant of \$513 that we received in November from the provincial Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Recreation. True, this grant is only a shadow of the \$1500-plus that we received last year, but nonetheless there is a lot that we can do with \$513 to help spread the word in St. Catharines that heritage can be fun!

Our 1997 St. Catharines Historical Calendar:

The Historical Society has done yet another *St. Catharines Historical Calendar* this year, our fourth one. We printed a little over 400 copies and have sold almost all of them. However, we do have seven or eight copies left unsold. If you would like to have one for yourself, please call us at 682-6053 and we will be happy to sell you a copy. The calendar costs \$6.

UPCOMING HERITAGE EVENTS

****February 6 (Thursday) -- Historical Society of St. Catharines meeting:**

7:30 p.m.: Nancy Butler will talk about three escaped slaves who succeeded as entrepreneurs in mid-19th century St. Catharines. (In the Mills Room, St. Catharines Public Library, 54 Church Street, St. Catharines.) (682-6053)

February 15 (Sat.) -- Niagara Regional Historical Council Heritage Showcase:

9:00a.m.-4:00p.m.: The annual Heritage Showcase, a festival of heritage activities held annually at the Pelham Public Library, 43 Pelham Town Square, in Fonthill, in honour of Federal and Provincial Heritage Weeks. (For further information, call 682-6053.)

February 20 (Thursday) -- Niagara Historical Society meeting:

7:30 p.m.: A special showing of excerpts from "Flight to Freedom," a PBS television documentary about the Underground Railroad that brought fugitive slaves to sanctuary in Canada. [At Navy Hall, Niagara-on-the-Lake. (682-6053).]

February 24 (Monday) -- Thorold and Beavertams Historical Society meeting:

7:30 p.m.: Sherman Zavitz gives an illustrated talk entitled "Destination: Niagara," focusing on the many notable travellers who have visited Niagara Falls. (At Chestnut Hall, Vine and Ormond streets, Thorold.) (682-6053).

****March 6 (Thursday) -- Historical Society of St. Catharines meeting:**

7:30 p.m.: Prof. Roberta Styran and Prof. Robert Taylor give an illustrated talk entitled "Crossing the Ditch," about the bridges over the Welland Canal. This meeting will be at the St. Catharines Museum, Lock 3 (682-6053)

****April 3 (Thursday) -- ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE ST. CATHARINES HISTORICAL SOCIETY:**

7:00 p.m.: The Society meets to choose its new executive for 1997-98. At 7:30 p.m., following that business meeting, painter **George Upper** will present an illustrated talk about his works, many of which focus on St. Catharines' heritage. (In the Mills Room, St. Catharines Public Library, 54 Church Street, St. Catharines.) (682-6053)