

The St. Catharines Historical Society **NEWSLETTER**

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MAY 1998

OILLE FOUNTAIN CEREMONY (May 9)

On Saturday morning, May 9, the Historical Society will sponsor the 22nd annual geranium potting ceremony at the Oille Fountain, corner of King and James streets, adjacent to the Old Courthouse. This event is done to honour the memory of Lucius Oille -- physician, entrepreneur, and former Mayor of St. Catharines.

Meet at the fountain at 11:00 a.m. and hear a few words about the distinguished life of Dr. Oille and his contributions to this city, followed by the planting of a geranium atop the Oille Fountain. That fountain was Dr. Oille's gift to the city at the end of his term as mayor (1878), a highly appropriate gift from the man who masterminded the establishment of St. Catharines' waterworks system. The ceremony lasts approximately 20 minutes.

VICTORIA LAWN CEMETERY WALK (May 24):

Last May the Historical Society sponsored a very successful walking tour of Victoria Lawn Cemetery, marking the centenary of the renaming of "the St. Catharines Cemetery" in honour of Queen Victoria, who in 1897 was celebrating her 60th year on the throne. Some one hundred people were treated to an informative look at the history of the cemetery and of some of the prominent and not so prominent persons buried there.

This year in May we go back to Victoria Lawn for a walk to be led by Arden Phair. At the time of our municipal election last November Arden spoke to the Society about the mayors of the City of St. Catharines -- their personalities, their achievements, and some of the odd details about them and our municipal history. The May 24th may be considered a continuation of that presentation. Arden will take us to the graves of some of our former civic leaders and review their contributions to our community. Not only will the afternoon be informative about the history of our city, but it is also a great opportunity to visit lovely Victoria Lawn Cemetery in late May, when it should be at its most beautiful.



This event (like most Society events) is open to everyone at no charge. No reservations are required -- just meet us at the main gates of Victoria Lawn, on Queenston Street next to the VLC administration building, at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, May 24. The walk will last approximately 90 minutes.

BUS TRIP TO HALDIMAND/NORFOLK (June 20)



On Saturday, June 20th, the Historical Society will be sponsoring its third annual bus trip. The previous two such trips -- to Hamilton in 1996 and to Toronto last year -- were well received and quite successful. This year's trip will leave St. Catharines at 8:30 and will take us to the renowned Thompson mansion at Ruthven Park, just outside of Cayuga, Ontario; then for lunch and some sightseeing in Port Dover, and will end with a visit to Cottonwood, an interesting Victorian mansion near Selkirk, Norfolk County. Historical commentary will be provided by Society president (and Brock University history professor) Wes Turner. The tour bus will return to downtown St. Catharines by 5:30 p.m.

The cost of this day-long trip (the bus itself and admission to the sites being visited) will be \$25 for Society members and \$28 for non-members. Lunch in Port Dover is not included in the ticket price). The bus (a Greyhound-type highway cruiser) will hold 47 persons. Seats are avail-

able on a first come, first served basis, first to members, then to the general public. Those interested in participating can call Dennis Gannon at 682-6053 to make reservations and to purchase tickets.

MERRITT CEREMONY, WALKING TOUR (July 4)

On Saturday, July 4th, the Historical Society will pay its annual homage to Canal founder/entrepreneur/statesman William Hamilton Merritt. At 10:00 a.m. participants will gather at the Merritt Statue, on St. Paul Street across from Merritt's Oak Hill mansion, now home to CKTB radio. The ceremony will consist of short comments by John Burtiak about the life of Merritt, followed by the placing of wreaths at the Merritt statue in his honour.



William Hamilton Merritt.

Following the short ceremony Dennis Gannon will lead a walking tour of "Merritt's St. Catharines." The itinerary will lead from the Merritt statue and Merritt's former mansion nearby, across the Burgoyne Bridge, past the sites of such former canal-oriented industries as the Taylor and Bate Brewery and Shickluna's shipyard, then on into West St. Catharines with comments on Ridley College, and will conclude at Rodman Hall, built in the 1850s by Merritt's son Thomas Rodman Merritt and now St. Catharines' fine arts gallery. There we expect to visit not only the grounds but also to have a tour of the interior and enjoy some refreshments. The walk should take about 90 minutes.

The Merritt commemoration and the walk that follows will be free of charge and open to all. We encourage you to join us for an interesting morning.

“ST. CATHARINES HISTORY” -- OUR NEW JOURNAL

To become more active in the publishing of local history, the St. Catharines Historical Society is planning a new journal, *St. Catharines History*. This magazine-style publication is expected to feature at least the following:

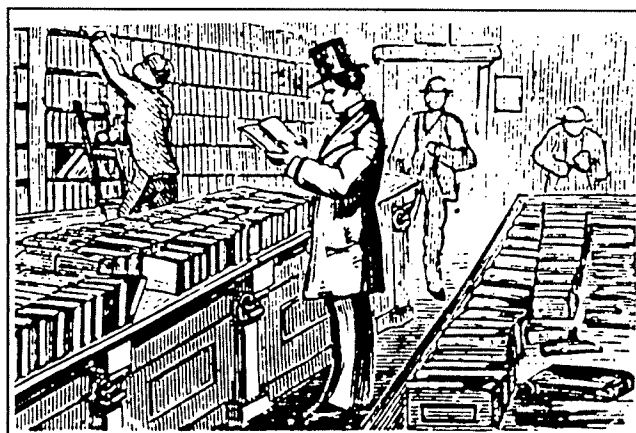
- papers delivered before the membership at general meetings
- research articles
- memoirs and oral histories
- excerpts from diaries
- transcriptions of original documents
- newspaper articles dating to the early nineteenth century

Unfortunately, almost none of the papers delivered at monthly meetings is preserved for public reading and rereading. Once the presentation is finished, the material so carefully researched and explained becomes only a memory for all but the presenter. With the new journal, however, at least some of the papers can be published for future reference.

Similarly, many of our members are engaged in historical research into various aspects of St. Catharines history. Without a way to publish the fruits of the research, though, nothing is done with the information. Now, with the journal, we hope that researchers will be encouraged to write articles, share their knowledge and preserve their efforts for generations to come.

Although some of us are involved in research, others have their historical information stored away in their memories. Wouldn't it be a valuable contribution if these memories and first-hand experiences could be shared with others? Oral histories and memoirs are a way to do this.

Sometimes, people have recorded events not in their memories only but also on paper in the form of a diary. Diaries normally are kept within families and not made public, but many fascinating details of life in the past could be shared with everyone if transcriptions could be made and published in the proposed journal.



Such diaries are invaluable to genealogists, many of whom are involved in their own research. In perusing the raw material of research, on microfilm or otherwise, many people come across fascinating documents. Some of these contain factual information but are particularly interesting also because of the style of the writing and the choice of words. In many cases, they provide a special glimpse into life of the past. Some of these documents, if carefully transcribed, would be enjoyed by many readers who would not ever be likely to happen upon them otherwise. Such transcribed documents would be a welcome addition to our journal.

Another similar type of item is word-for-word copies of newspaper articles of long ago. Who wouldn't be interested in, for instance, Dr. Mack's letter to the editor outlining the need for a training school for nurses? Or an account of the black community in the 1830s celebrating emancipation day? Or the details of a disastrous downtown fire? Or descriptions of turn-of-the-century stores? St. Catharines has a rich history of newspapers, and our journal could be a means of bringing to light some fascinating items.

If you have any ideas for the journal or if you have something you would like to contribute, please contact the editor, Paul Hutchinson. His phone number is 227-2699; his e-mail address is paul.hutchinson1@sympatico.ca; and his postal address is 141 Bradley Street, St. Catharines L2T 1R8. With your support and contributions, the journal can be a success.

EDITOR'S NOTE: WHAT HAPPENED TO OUR NEWSLETTER?

Your newsletter editor wishes to express his regrets about the irregular schedule of newsletter over the past year. Unfortunately, he has had to spend much of the last seven months out of town, dealing with a family crisis. Under those circumstances he was unable to continue producing newsletters on a quarterly basis, as you have a right to expect. (I understand that some people were beginning to wonder if we still intended to publish a newsletter!)

Now that my life is back to normal you can expect once more to receive Historical Society newsletters in August, December, February, and May, and they will be somewhat healthier in size than this one (usually eight pages long).

Thanks very much for your forbearance during this unusual time in my life. Many thanks to Bill Stevens and other members of the executive who produced a newsletter in February, in my absence.

THE SOCIETY'S EXECUTIVE, 1998-99:

At the Historical Society's Annual General Meeting on April 2, the members assembled chose the following persons to sit on the Society's executive for 1998-99:

Wesley Turner, President
Joyce DeForest, Vice President
William Stevens, Secretary
Avril Brass, Treasurer
John Burtiak

Paul Hutchinson
Tom Jenkyns
Brenda Zadaroznij
Dennis Gannon, Past President

OTHER UPCOMING HERITAGE EVENTS:

May 30 (Saturday):

11 a.m.-5:00 p.m.: The annual cruise from Port Weller into Lake Ontario and along the Niagara River, with historical commentary by Brock University History Professor Wesley Turner, and a ship-board lunch, all for \$79.

8 p.m.-12 midnight: An evening cruise from Port Weller into Lake Ontario and along the Niagara River, with dinner and dancing, \$59. Call Niagara College for ticket information (735-2211,x7510).

June 13 (Saturday):

All day: The Lundy's Lane Historical Society's annual bus trip includes visits to the Airplane Heritage Museum in Hamilton, the Haldimand Museum in Cayuga, and the Jordan Museum. For ticket information call John Burtiak at 688-5550, x3264.

June 21 (Sunday):

All day: Family Fun Day at Old Fort Niagara, with hands-on historical activities for all ages. At Old Fort Niagara, Youngstown, New York. Admission fee. (716/745-7611)

July 4 (Saturday):

All day: "American Garrison Day." Historic Fort Erie returns to the time when American troops were in possession of the fort. Admission fee. At Historic Fort Erie, 350 Lakeshore Road, Fort Erie, Ontario. (356-2241, x222 or 871-0540)

July 18-19 (Saturday-Sunday):

All day: Cavalry of the War of 1812. Two days of demonstrations of period cavalry tactics and equipment. At Old Fort Niagara, Youngstown, New York. Admission fee. (716/745-7611)