

# BULLETIN

THE ONTARIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

LOCAL SOCIETIES COMMITTEE

40 EGLINTON AVENUE EAST  
TORONTO 12 ONTARIO

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## From the President's Address at the Annual Meeting at Sault Ste. Marie, June, 1970

I am going to talk about some general ideas - ideas based solidly in past experience - based also on what I have observed in many miles of travel around Ontario in the last year.

First - I was surprised at the number of people in local historical societies who have asked, "What is the O.H.S.? What do you do?" All of us should take a look at what we are doing to let people know about us. We are known officially and are recognized by government as the voice of the local historical societies. How can we let people know about us? What can we do to blow our own horn?

Secondly - I have been concerned about the number of local historical societies who want to increase their activities and their memberships and want to know how to do it. No organization can exist in magnificent isolation - you must put yourself before the public. HOW?

What is the image of your society? Is it a closed group? How do people "get in"? Is it an "old settlers" society where the members must have at least two generations buried in the local cemetery? How active is your membership committee - or do you have one? Are there any young people in your society? Do you still depend on those who have given so much over the years and would now like to sit back and just be audience? How about your executive council? - do you have a set term of office, does it change often - or is the gavel handed over practically at the graveside? All these things form the image which can be a deterrent or an attraction to new members.

You don't have to be a trained historian to enjoy history. Local history is not to be sniffed at as an amateur's study of the lowest form of history. It is the roots - the basis from which generalizations grow and trends can be determined. Since local history is close to the people it is more vital. We can identify with it and it gives us a sense of continuity. By studying local history you can get that sense of identity without being an "old settler". The beauty of the study of local history is that the emphasis can be on the specific, on details, on people with the broader picture in the background. The study of local history should not be just nostalgia for the past. It should develop an understanding of the past. Can we relate the past to the present? To do this our societies must have some involvement in the life of the community.



There are two kinds of involvement in community affairs - both consistent with the aims of historical societies. First, - involvement in education, and second, - involvement in conservation and preservation. Many local historical museums have excellent educational programs, which appeal to the general public as well as the school children. However, an historical society does not necessarily need a museum to carry on a meaningful educational program.

All local historical societies can, and should be, involved in preservation. I'm talking now of the buildings which are the fabric of our lives and which should be preserved to keep the character of our communities. The preservation of a living community - a judicious mixture of the old and the new - should concern all who are interested in history. We must be watch dogs to save the buildings which speak for their own time; we can be watch dogs by letting interested bodies know when a building is threatened with disfiguring alteration or destruction. In the near future we hope to have general provincial legislation to make it possible to protect historic buildings.

And so this is my advice for local historical societies. Speak with authority and conviction and you will be heard. Talk about what you do and make your community aware of your existence, - and incidentally, just mention the O.H.S. too!

#### A Grave Situation

"New Dimensions" is one of the publications issued by the News and Information Services of the Ontario Department of Education. In Vol. 5, No. 1, the provocative title above caught our eye. It is an account of an in-depth cemetery survey completed by the students of St. Joseph's school in Simcoe, Ontario. Since so many historical societies and genealogical groups are involved in making cemetery listings, it is interesting to read what the school children have done. The following are some of the topics discussed as a result of the study:-

1. Population growth and average ages.
2. Causes of death and burial customs,
3. Name changes.
4. Epitaphs and symbolism.
5. Stones, - types, durability, shapes, rubbings, etc.
6. Legal aspects, - care, movings, etc.
7. Maps and location plottings.
8. Tracing the history of the community.

Similar cemetery studies are being undertaken by other schools as part of the local history program. In the process, the children are learning much about their ancestors, and some rundown cemeteries are getting a much-needed face-lift.



The Story of a Street

"Badger History" - published by the Wisconsin Historical Society has an account of a project which might interest some of our local societies. It explored the possibility of supplementing maps with photographs and sketches. The article describes work done by a small historical society in a cross-roads village in Wisconsin. The project started with an early bird's-eye map dated 1875, and then jumped to a sketch map of 1905. The later map showed the streets and the buildings in the area. It was designed originally to help insurance salesmen and it listed all the businesses carried on in the village at that time.

When these maps were supported by photographs of the same period, it provided an opportunity for the viewer to step back visually into the past. Details in both maps and pictures served to answer some of the questions raised by local historians, and provoked lively comment from the general public.

The Old Family School

The September, 1970 issue of Imperial Oil Review has a nostalgic article about the preservation of S.S. #6, Mulock, - a one-roomed school house which has been phased out by today's educational reorganization. One of Imperial Oil's field men happened to be in the district and learned that the old school was for sale. He was especially interested in it because his great-grandfather had helped to build the original school in 1858, and members of his family had sentimental memories and ties with it. He bought the school house and is presently living in it for week-ends, taking his time in furnishing it with suitable articles picked up at auctions in the area.

The article goes on to point out the various purposes for which many other old school houses have been bought in order to preserve them. One, near Bolton, Ontario, is now the headquarters for an out-door science school. Another, in Prince Edward Island, where Lucy Maud Montgomery, author of Anne of Green Gables, was once the teacher, is to be designated an historic site.

The Eleventh Annual Seminar on Glass

A number of local societies report that sometime during the last year an evening was devoted to a speaker on glass. To those interested may we commend the Seminars on Glass held in October each year at the Corning Glass Centre in Corning, N.Y. These Seminars last for a week and utilize the fabulous museum collection of glass of all ages and provenances as a setting for lectures and discussions given by outstanding authorities in the field. It is interesting to note that one of the lecturers this year is the lady who compiled the five "dictionaries" of American Glass, Sandwich Glass, Pottery and Porcelain, etc., for Woman's Day magazine a few years back.



Quite apart from the Seminars, a visit to the Corning Glass Museum is a "must". It can easily be done on a long week-end, and the methods of display, the storage rooms, the demonstrations and the whole general set-up of the museum is an eye-opener to most visitors.

#### Bayfield Historical Society

The Bayfield Branch of the Huron County Historical Society claims modestly that it is a small group, but we think that the members have come up with an excellent idea worthy of emulation by much larger societies. They have drawn up a list of some twenty-one topics, all pertinent to the local history of the village of Bayfield. Several members are assigned to research each topic with a view to presenting a paper on it at one of the meetings. These papers are typed. One is kept by the society in Bayfield, and a second copy goes to the Huron County Archives in Goderich. In addition, several of the members have been searching the newspaper files at Clinton, (ten miles away) and copying the Bayfield news items. All this information is filed under appropriate headings and is available for local researchers.

We would like to congratulate Mrs. LeRoy Poth for the excellent report she has sent us of the activities of the Bayfield group last year. The meetings sound most interesting and it is difficult to see how they could fail to arouse the interest of the community in its own history.

#### Lundy's Lane Historical Society Booklet

This society has recently issued a very attractive and useful booklet. It has been prepared to preserve the information available on the historic buildings that remain in the area of Niagara Falls. Some of these buildings are interesting for their historical associations and others for their architecture. Except for a very few, all are well over a hundred years old. Since these buildings are scattered over the entire City of Niagara Falls, they have been grouped into four tours to make it easier to locate them as one drives along the various streets. Pictures of some of the houses and a map of the area increase its usefulness.

We feel that brochures of this type are excellent, because they encourage people to walk and look and at the same time learn something of the local background of the community.

#### Norwich and District Historical Society

This local society certainly started off its 1970 season with outstanding success. To begin with, the first publication, - an account of the Norwich Settlement to 1855, came off the press just before the opening of the new historical museum in an un-used Quaker meeting-house. The guest speaker at the opening was Mr. Sheldon Carroll, curator of the Numismatic collection of the Bank of Canada in Ottawa. He spoke of the value of museums and numismatic collections.



In addition to the museum collection there was also a showing of old steam engines, tractors and other pieces of old agricultural machinery. To finish off the day, there was a chicken barbeque at which about seven hundred people were served. It sounds like a lot of work and planning by the members of the society but the weather co-operated and everyone enjoyed himself.

### Waterloo Historical Society

Waterloo Historical Society reports a busy year with some unusual activities. Its major project is the publication of an annual volume which has appeared continually since its inception in 1912. Each year volumes are distributed to all libraries, schools and universities in the County, as well as to the membership. The number of volumes required has been increasing as steadily as the membership which now totals 600.

In May, the Society sponsored an archaeological "dig" at one of the 25 Indian village sites located in Waterloo County. The work was conducted by the Waterloo Lutheran University under the direction of Dr. Norman Wagner.

Also in May, a four-and-a-half hour tour of Waterloo County was arranged for 35 Grade XII students of the Seaway District High School from Iroquois, Ontario. The comprehensive itinerary included the "Mennonite Country" in the northern part of the County, as well as other points of interest typical to this area.

The Waterloo County Historical Society is also sponsoring the inventory of historic buildings in the County. To date more than 185 buildings have been recorded.

### The Macpherson House in Napanee

The Allan Macpherson House in Napanee is a period house of 1820 to 1840. It is furnished as a home, with furniture of the period when Allan Macpherson lived there and John A. visited. Last December, there was "Christmas at the Laird's" beginning on a Sunday with three dramatic scenes in the ballroom, - one the episode of Rat and Mole getting ready for Christmas in "The Wind in the Willows". During the days after Sunday, bread was baked in the brick oven (and sold), plum puddings were steamed in the fireplace, and mincemeat bubbled on the hearth. Flitches of bacon and ham smoked in the smoke chamber.

The ballroom lends itself to special displays, and already, in 1970, has had pictures by Philippa Faulkner of Belleville for a month, and a two-day exhibition of antique clocks belonging to Dr. Chesebrough of Bath.



One of the most exciting developments has been the decision of the Ontario Branch of the American Herb Society to undertake the restoration of the grounds to the sort of gardens the Macphersons might have had. Much research is going into this.

The President of the Lennox and Addington Historical Society, Mrs. N. W. Hutchison, tells us that they have had many school classes visiting Macpherson House, and that they are happy to note the increased use of museums by teachers in teaching local history.

#### The Regional Workshops

The fifth semi-annual Local Societies Regional Workshop for the St. Lawrence - Bay of Quinte area was held on October 3rd, 1970, in Macpherson House at Napanee. The Workshop, bringing together representatives of local historical societies from Glengarry to Hastings, was co-sponsored by the Lennox and Addington Historical Society. A very pleasant setting and a delicious lunch prepared by the ladies of the host society set the participants at ease, making for an informal and useful workshop.

Judge G. F. Smith, past-president of the Lennox and Addington Historical Society spoke and answered questions about the legal, financial and practical aspects of such projects as the restoration of Macpherson House. Mrs. Angus, President of The Ontario Historical Society, led a discussion on the display of historical dress. These discussions, which stressed participation by all present, and the consideration of mutual problems provided stimulation and encouragement.

Some societies may be reluctant to co-sponsor these regional workshops, but those who have done so would, we think, agree that they do not require particularly elaborate arrangements. The local society which undertakes this task provides a room large enough for an informal meeting of twenty to twenty-five people, on a Saturday morning from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. with coffee for participants as they arrive. The St. Lawrence - Bay of Quinte group has met in blockhouses, in a museum, in an historic house and in a modern seminar room at Queen's University. Restaurant facilities should be available nearby for lunch, or failing that, some societies have provided economical but delicious lunches for participants. In fact, it has been said several times that local societies run the best and most reasonable restaurants in town!

Announcements and registration forms are sent out by The Ontario Historical Society office in Toronto to the local societies in the region. The Ontario Historical Society also helps find resource people for the programs, but the workshops have greatest relevance if program suggestions come from the local societies themselves. It has been our experience in this area that these workshops provide valuable sources of mutual encouragement, inspiration and strength, but they can only prosper with the help of each society.



While the St. Lawrence - Bay of Quinte area is the oldest of the Regional Workshops and has held the greatest number of meetings, there are others following along. The third meeting of the Toronto area is being co-sponsored by the Etobicoke Historical Society at Montgomery Inn. The Peterborough area is holding its third meeting at Port Hope as guests of the East Durham Historical Society. The second meeting of the Hamilton district is being planned for Brantford early next spring.

We would be happy indeed, to hear from any local society who would like to undertake to co-sponsor one of these Regional Workshops. Just contact The Ontario Historical Society office at 40 Eglinton Avenue East, in Toronto, for full information about it.

### Gleanings

Guelph Historical Society recognized the City's 143rd Birthday on Thursday, April 23rd, by arranging the planting of three trees in the John Galt Gardens at Riverside Park in Guelph.

We welcome two new Historical Societies to Corporate membership in The Ontario Historical Society, - Vaughan Township Historical Society and The Historical Society of the County of Prescott. We wish them continuing success in all their undertakings.

The Ottawa Valley Historical Society reports a good year. Meetings were interesting and were well-attended. This Society operates the Champlain Trail Museum and Pioneer Home, and this year they have had a record attendance of almost 12,000 visitors. Congratulations are in order.

The City of Kingston celebrates its Tercentenary in 1973 and already the Historical Society has set up a Planning Committee to make suggestions for a number of projects which it might undertake. The Society expects to provide accurate historical information, resource material and informed speakers to assist participating civic groups. This, it seems to us, is a positive and practical approach to the problem of community involvement.

In view of today's preoccupation with calories and diets, it is interesting to find an item from the Ladies' Home Journal of fifty years ago. To gain weight and overcome tension, it is recommended that a person "eat one grape a minute for an hour at a time and repeat several times a day". We wonder if it was effective!



The Niagara Historical Society has chosen two water-colours from its collection of originals and has had them reproduced for the society, in a limited edition, by a Niagara Falls Printing Company. One print is "A View of Niagara, 1781-83" by James Peachey, and the other shows the "King Street Landing, Niagara" and is unsigned. The latter print is dated 1854, and on the bottom margin, the names of the houses and establishments are written in. These charming colour prints make delightful gifts for anyone interested in the Niagara area.

The York Pioneer and Historical Society opened its 1970-71 season with a talk on "Early Clocks" given by a speaker whose hobby is collecting and restoring old clocks. He gave a brief account of early time-keeping devices and went on to comment on clocks which he had brought from his own collection as well as a number which had been brought in by the members. Some of the clocks had been rescued from trash cans and restored. To its owner's great surprise, one of the clocks turned out to be a very early, very rare and very valuable example.

As soon as the 1971 calendars come out, members and historical societies should circle June 17, 18, 19. These are the dates for The Ontario Historical Society's Annual Meeting to be held at Trent University in Peterborough. The planning committee is already hard at work to make this the outstanding historical event of 1971.

Affiliated Societies who have NOT sent in Annual Reports and publications for 1969 to the central office at 40 Eglinton Avenue East, Toronto 315, should take note that their affiliated status may be cancelled by failure to do so. Now that there is a full-time secretary in the office, these things are being much more closely checked than was done formerly.

The Editor is grateful to all those who sent in items of news for this edition of the Bulletin. We are entirely dependent on the local societies for material, and it is hoped that more groups will send us their news and views. It must be understood, however, that the Bulletin is the responsibility of the Local Societies Committee of The Ontario Historical Society, and that we can use only news of the doings of these societies. We do not wish to impinge on the Museums Association or the Library Association, both of which have their own news publications.