

# OHS BULLETIN

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ONTARIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## REMEMBERING NO.2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION IN OWEN SOUND



Pictured here (left to right) on June 26 at the Grey Roots Museum & Archives are Daniel Dishaw, Janie Cooper-Wilson, Dorothy Abbott, and Barry Penhale (centre).

**Daniel Dishaw**, OHS Communications and Outreach Manager  
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On Sunday June, 26, I travelled to Owen Sound for the first time in over two years. It was an absolute pleasure to be reunited with friends and colleagues from across Grey-Bruce and Owen Sound. While our organization has continued to press on throughout the pandemic, we have all been missing that crucial element of human connection in our work—work that relies heavily on a sense of community.

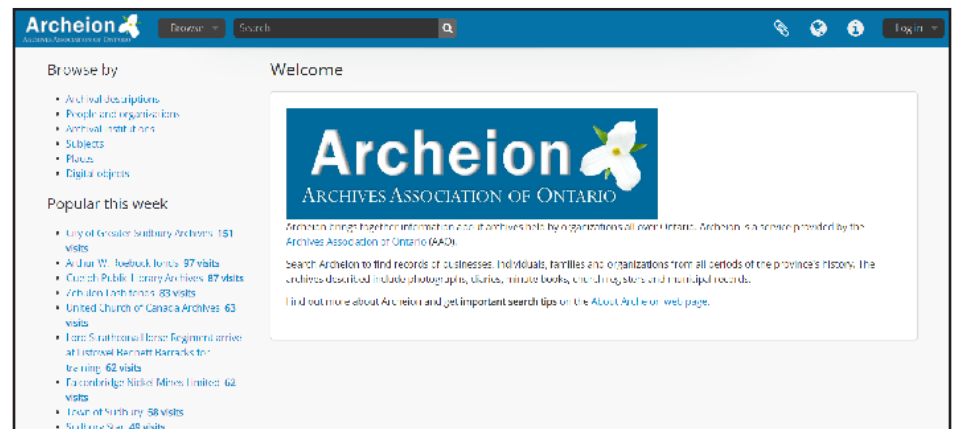
One of our newest affiliated members, the Grey County Black History Society, invited me to attend their event “Lest We Forget: A Tribute to the No. 2 Construction Battalion” at the Grey Roots Museum & Archives. The No. 2 Construction Battalion was a segregated military unit that served overseas in the First World War. The battalion was established by the Canadian Armed Forces in July 1916 as a response to the growing number of Black Canadians who wanted to serve their country but were being turned away by recruitment offices. Black volunteers were being rejected on the basis of racist and baseless claims that they were not well-suited to military service. Many white soldiers refused to serve with Black soldiers in battle. Despite the horrendous prejudice that they faced, Black Canadians insisted that they be allowed to serve their country at war. While their requests were finally accepted in 1916, the battalion they were placed in would only play a supporting role overseas—they were not permitted to serve as soldiers.

‘NO.2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION’ CONTINUED ON PAGE 4...

## IN THIS ISSUE

REMEMBERING NO.2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION	1
AAO'S ARCHEION BRINGS ONTARIO'S HISTORY TO YOU	1
PRESIDENT'S REPORT	2
OHS AGM REGISTRATION NOW OPEN	2
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT	3
CEMETERY DEFENCE NEWS	4
OHS WELCOMES NEW MINISTER, HON. NEIL LUMSDEN	4
MUSEUM MILESTONES	5
PRESERVING MENNONITE HISTORY IN ESSEX-KENT	5
BARRY PENHALE'S ONTARIO	6
FROM THE BOOKSHELF	7

## AAO ARCHEION BRINGS ONTARIO'S HISTORY TO YOU



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The past two years have changed the ways in which we conduct historical research: from visiting libraries and archives to accessing their holdings virtually. While many institutions have once again reopened to researchers, the revolution in digital access is here to stay. The Archives Association of Ontario (AAO) recommends its multi-repository database, [Archeion](#), for researching Ontario's rich history from the comfort of your home!

Archeion is Ontario's Archival Information Network, an online research tool providing access to descriptions of archival records held by members of the AAO from across the province. The records themselves are preserved and made accessible by Archeion's member institutions. Archeion is a member-supported service provided by the AAO.

The AAO represents archives and archivists who are committed to promoting the preservation and use of the documentary heritage of Ontario. It provides educational and outreach programs for archivists across the province and promotes professional standards, procedures, and practices in archival repositories.

Archival institutions that are members of the AAO are eligible to have descriptions of their archives included in Archeion. Researchers can then search and browse those institutions' archival descriptions and authority records (descriptions of persons, families, and corporate bodies) and discover a wealth of resources documenting the many facets of Ontario's history. The records described in Archeion range from textual records such as correspondence, newspapers, minutes, and diaries, to photographs and albums, scrapbooks, works of art, maps, sound recordings of oral history interviews, video recordings of newsreel footage, and so much more. Many of the descriptions are also linked to digital versions of the records (called digital objects) that can be viewed directly in your browser or downloaded.

‘ARCHEION’ CONTINUED ON PAGE 6...



# PRESIDENT’S REPORT

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Hello. Bonjour. Boozhoo.

It is hard to believe that another *Bulletin* is upon us! Like many of you I am sure, I have been taking advantage of the reopening of the province and the pent-up adventuring and exploring that usually defines the summer. In fact, as I write this message, I am visiting family in Johnstown and enjoying the many historical sites and museums along Highway 2.

As you will read, the Ontario Historical Society has also been tremendously busy over the past number of months. When we reopened the doors of John McKenzie House to the public, activity sky-rocketed. Society staff and board members have also been pleased to resume in-person activities and attend events across the province to support our members and their important work. In just the last few months, these have included Doors Open Hamilton, incorporation meetings in Elliot Lake, member outreach in Manitoulin Island, attendance at the Grey County Black Heritage Society's event in Owen Sound honouring the Black soldiers who served in the No.2 Construction Battalion, and OHS meetings in Red Rock (to name just a few).

In spring 2022, OHS staff began welcoming visitors and events back to the historic John McKenzie House (JMH) in Willowdale. For the first time since 2019, the OHS participated in Doors Open Toronto on May 28 and 29, and welcomed over 700 visitors to the JMH, mostly from the local area, who were excited to be able to step inside the house once again. Special thanks to the Jack Pine Gallery, which coordinated with us to animate the space around JMH during Doors Open with a gallery in the Coach House and eight artists who painted on the grounds.

We have since hosted neighbour events such as art classes, the Willowdale Ratepayer’s Association barbecue, and a family visit from relatives of the McKenzie family. Our rentals have included Trinity Theatre, a week of discussions held by IFEX International Journalists for Free Expression, and classes held at JMH by a certified Eden Energy Medicine Practitioner. OHS staff continue to follow all recommended safety measures when welcoming visitors, and we look forward to continuing to provide a safe and healthy space at the historic JMH for everyone to enjoy.

Staff and members of the Board of Directors have also been busy planning our Annual General Meeting (AGM). I am pleased to announce



In 2000, the OHS incorporated Michael’s Bay Historical Society (MBHS) with its mandate to acquire and preserve the original town site (circa 1865) which includes five historic cemeteries. Manitoulin Island’s first settler town literally vanished in the early 1900s. After two decades of relentless advocacy, MBHS finally acquired the site from the Government of Canada.

Pictured above: OHS Executive Director Rob Leverty (left) visiting the Manitou River Rapids during a site tour conducted on May 8, 2022. Rob congratulated Ed Sagle, President of MBHS, remarking that “I am truly inspired by the volunteers of MBHS, who have worked tirelessly for 20 years to acquire and preserve not only an important historic site but also a provincially significant natural heritage treasure.”

that Canadian journalist, author, and documentary producer Steve Paikin will be the keynote speaker at our 134th AGM, to be held virtually on Wednesday, November 2 at 7 p.m. He will be speaking about his latest book *John Turner: An Intimate Biography of Canada's 17th Prime Minister* (more about which can be found directly below this column).

On behalf of the OHS Board of Directors and the Society’s membership, I want to send our deepest condolences to family and friends of Douglas Leighton (OHS President 1987–89) and Rae Fleming, both of whom recently passed away. Doug and Rae were outstanding Canadian scholars dedicated to public history and long-time members of the Society and subscribers to *Ontario History*. We salute and remember their dedication to and support for the OHS mandate.

Until November, all my best.

## NORTH YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY LEADS CENTENARY CELEBRATION



Photo – Joshua Bowman

On June 13, 2022, the North York Historical Society (NYHS) led a celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the City of North York. Remarks were presented by (pictured L-R) Councillors James Pasternak and Shelley Carrol, NYHS Director Marla Weingarten, Toronto Mayor John Tory, Councillor John Filion and (not pictured) NYHS President Glenn Bonnetta. The NYHS is looking forward to the opening of the new North York History Room at North York Central Library later this year. OHS Project Manager and Librarian Sarah McCabe was also in attendance to support the work of the NYHS.

## OHS AGM REGISTRATION NOW OPEN, STEVE PAIKIN WILL DELIVER KEYNOTE



Canadian journalist, author, and documentary producer Steve Paikin will deliver the keynote speech at the OHS 134th Annual General Meeting on Wednesday, November 2 at 7 p.m. Paikin will be speaking about his latest book *John Turner: An Intimate Biography of Canada's 17th Prime Minister*. More information about the new book can be found on the [Sutherland House Books website](#).

In 2016, Paikin won the Ontario Historical Society's Donald Grant Creighton Award for the best biography or autobiography highlighting life in Ontario, past or present, for his book [Bill Davis: Nation Builder, and Not So Bland After All](#).

We are pleased to announce that the AGM will once again be held virtually. We have received overwhelmingly positive feedback from our members who have been able to virtually attend the previous two AGM's from all corners of Ontario. More information on the AGM will be made available shortly.

Please call or email the OHS office to register for the AGM: 416-226-9011, [ohs@ontariohistoricalsociety.ca](mailto:ohs@ontariohistoricalsociety.ca)



# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

**Rob Leverty**, Executive Director  
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## New OHS Incorporations

I am pleased to report that the OHS Board of Directors has recently voted to incorporate two new not-for-profit historical organizations, one located in the eastern part of the province and the other in northern Ontario.

The purpose of Lanark County Arts & Heritage (LCAH) is to enhance and encourage preservation of the heritage of Lanark County by bringing together those people interested in its diverse arts and history. It is very impressive indeed that eleven founding member organizations have launched LCAH. For further information, please contact [lanarkcountymuseums@gmail.com](mailto:lanarkcountymuseums@gmail.com)

The new Elliot Lake Historical Society (ELHS) seeks to advance education by improving the public's understanding and awareness of the diverse history of Elliot Lake and its region. After a successful community meeting in May endorsing the establishment and incorporation of ELHS, former Mayor (1988–2006), George Farkouh told me he was thrilled with the evening. He confided that "a historical society is a very positive step forward, good for economic development and the health of our community." For further information, please contact [vesuvio@eastlink.ca](mailto:vesuvio@eastlink.ca).

We salute and toast all of our fellow citizens who generously donated their time and incredible expertise to establish and incorporate LCAH and ELHS through the *OHS Special Act, 1899*. Congratulations!

## New Ontario Business Registry

As part of the new *Ontario Not-for-Profit Corporations Act*, the Province of Ontario has launched an Ontario Business Registry for not-for-profit corporations to register, file annual returns, and update their information online. All not-for-profit organizations must register their organization (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-business-registry>) to keep their corporation status in good standing with the Government of Ontario. The OHS has created a document to help our members sign up for and update their corporate information through the Ontario Business Registry. If you have not signed up already or are having trouble understanding the new system, please get in touch with my colleague Heather Anderson ([handerson@ontariohistoricalsociety.ca](mailto:handerson@ontariohistoricalsociety.ca)) and she will send you the document.

## Property Tax Exemption on Built and Natural Heritage

Earlier this year I gave my fourth detailed submission in the last two years to the Provincial Government on our request **"That the Government of Ontario take province-wide action and amend the *Assessment Act* so that not-for-profit historical organizations incorporated through affiliation with The Ontario Historical Society under its *Special Act, 1899*, be exempt from property taxes, and that exemption remain active as long as those member organizations continue to be in Good Standing with The Ontario Historical Society."**



Photo – Courtesy of Tom Sasvari, *The Manitoulin Expositor*

Faced with the imminent demolition of an historic school (1922) in their community, Friends of the Mindemoya Old School (FOMOS) incorporated through the *OHS Special Act, 1899* on January 29, 2021. FOMOS issued a press release stating, "The school, a solid brick and stone building, is historically significant, being one of the earliest Consolidated Schools in Ontario. We want to save this building not just because of its history, but also because tearing it down is such a terrible waste. We've become a throwaway society and that has to stop."

Seen here in front of the historic school on Sunday May 8, 2022, is OHS ED Rob Leverty with FOMOS President Jan McQuay. After an extensive building inspection and tour with Jan, Linda Kelly (Manitoulin resident and former OHS Secretary), and Tom Sasvari (News Editor, *The Manitoulin Expositor*), Rob declared, "No photo could ever do justice to seeing the wonderful, skilled craftsmanship of this magnificent building. Where some in the municipality saw a liability, FOMOS and the OHS saw an invaluable community asset."

Eighteen months after incorporation, including countless hours of relentless volunteer work and with a membership of over 300, FOMOS signed a 21-year lease with the Municipality of Central Manitoulin on July 8, 2022. FOMOS President Jan McQuay then stated, "This iconic century building has such exciting potential. Having a lease is a major milestone in bringing the Old School back to life. Now the real work begins!"

For further information or to make a donation please visit [www.mindemoyaoldschool.ca](http://www.mindemoyaoldschool.ca) or contact [mindemoyaoldschool@gmail.com](mailto:mindemoyaoldschool@gmail.com).

As the 43rd Parliament at Queen's Park convenes, I urge you to ask your recently elected Member of the Legislative Assembly to support our request for property tax exemption for OHS incorporated organizations.

I am pleased to inform you that in June the Ontario Association of Former Parliamentarians, created in 2000 by a specific Act of the Ontario Legislature, became a member of OHS and a subscriber to our scholarly journal *Ontario History*.

I hope you enjoy the rest of our summer!

## ANNUAL AUDIT REVEALS SOUND AND HEALTHY BALANCE SHEET



On June 16, 2022, OHS ED Rob Leverty celebrated a successful 2021 financial audit with Abdul Ahmed, Manager, Akler Browning LLP. Abdul conducted the independent audit for the Society which showed that the OHS balance sheet is sound, healthy, and debt free.

## KEEPING UP WITH THE HISTORIC JOHN MCKENZIE HOUSE



The OHS continues to be responsible for ongoing operations and maintenance expenses at John McKenzie House. Seen here in the front hall after the annual fire extinguisher inspection on July 12 are OHS ED Rob Leverty and Veronica Cook, Fire Suppression Technician for Johnson Controls.



# CEMETERY DEFENCE NEWS

Laura Suchan  
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Some good news was received this week when it was announced the Johnston Cemetery in Pefferlaw, Ontario, was purchased by the Town of Georgina for a cost of \$17 000. This was the news the OHS had been waiting to hear ever since Sansiveria Investments Limited proposed to close the historic cemetery and move those interred to nearby Cook’s Cemetery in early 2021. At the time, the OHS Board of Directors opposed the closure of the Johnston Cemetery and submitted a letter to Dr. Crystal Forrest, Registrar, Burial Sites (Acting), arguing that the closure was not in the public interest and there was no compelling reason to close the cemetery. In a press release that came out shortly after the purchase was announced, Mayor Margaret Quirk said, “This is something that we have been working diligently on, and I am pleased that we were able to do this for the Johnston family — and for Pefferlaw, given its historical significance to the community.” The Johnston cemetery was a burying ground between 1860 and the mid-1950s and those interred are some of the earliest settlers of Pefferlaw. These include members of Robert Johnston’s family, on whose

property the cemetery was once located. The cemetery property is enclosed with an ornate iron fence, also of historical significance as it is believed to be the work of William R. Griffith, a famous local blacksmith. Future improvements to the Johnston Cemetery site may include the addition of signage, painting and preservation of the wrought iron fence, and adding an access gate.

Also of note in the Town of Georgina is the upcoming Pioneer Cemeteries Needs Assessment Study in which the Johnston Cemetery will be included. The assessment will provide guidance to Council and staff on standards of maintenance for pioneer cemeteries. According to Courtney Rennie, Senior Project Manager for the Town of Georgina, the purpose of the assessment is to develop recommendations for what work is needed at each site to ensure the cemeteries are in a state of good repair. To assist the Town with future planning, it will also include estimates for any recommended work and suggestions for signage and future maintenance standards. There will be a public consultation component to give the community an opportunity to comment on any recommendations put forth. The OHS has been added to the stakeholder list and will receive updates as the study progresses. Over the past several months, I and others on the OHS Preservation and Cemeteries Committee have fielded numerous requests for guidance from groups concerned about the state of historic cemeteries in their communities. It is a step in the right direction by the Town of Georgina to ensure their early cemeteries are maintained in a respectful and dignified manner. I hope other municipalities will follow suit.

## ...‘NO.2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION’ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

These men served honourably, despite being treated so poorly by a government that they were volunteering to fight for. Their contributions were largely forgotten in the 100+ years that followed, something that many community leaders and public historians are now working to correct. The event held on June 26 served to honour and remember the sacrifices these men made for their country, and to recognize the appalling racism they faced. We also gathered in Owen Sound to celebrate the Government of Canada's official apology to the members of the No.2 Construction Battalion, which would take place on July 9 in Truro, Nova Scotia. Over 500 descendants of the men who served in No.2 Construction Battalion attended that public apology. In fact, several descendants were in attendance at Grey Roots Museum and Archives on June 26. It was an honour to meet them and hear them tell stories about their family members.

In addition to honouring the brave men of the No.2 Construction Battalion, the event program underscored our responsibility as public

historians to share these stories with our communities so that they cannot be forgotten or overlooked. The Hon. Dr. Jean Augustine delivered the keynote speech on June 26 and spoke about the importance of public historians and grassroots history groups like the Grey County Black Heritage Society. Dr. Augustine referenced her own experience as a Social Studies teacher in Ontario, recalling that "we taught a little bit about the Underground Railroad, but [...] it ended in Toronto." Dr. Augustine went on to explain that she had to learn from Janie (Cooper-Wilson) and the Wilson sisters (Carolyn and Sylvia) that the Underground Railroad came all the way up to Owen Sound—that there were countless family histories that revealed so much more than what was being taught in schools. In the same tradition, the Grey County Black Heritage Society is working to educate all of us on this significant story from our history. If you want to learn more about this fantastic new group, keep up with them on Facebook at [@GreyCountyBlackHeritageSociety](#).

## COMMUNITY MEMBERS VOTE UNANIMOUSLY TO INCORPORATE THROUGH OHS



On Tuesday, May 10 the OHS held a successful community meeting at the Mt. Dufour Ski Chalet in Elliot Lake to discuss the establishment and incorporation of a new historical society. The participants voted unanimously to incorporate the Elliot Lake Historical Society (ELHS) through the *OHS Special Act, 1899*. Seen here after the meeting with OHS ED Rob Levery are Marie Murphy-Foran, Vice Chair, and Edo Ten Broek, Chair. On June 14 the OHS Board of Directors voted to incorporate ELHS as an independent not-for-profit corporation. For further information or to make a donation to ELHS, please contact [vesuvio@eastlink.ca](mailto:vesuvio@eastlink.ca).

## OHS WELCOMES NEW MINISTER, HON. NEIL LUMSDEN



The OHS Board of Directors and Staff are pleased to welcome the new Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, the Honourable Neil Lumsden. Lumsden was elected to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in the 2022 Provincial Election as the MPP for Hamilton East – Stoney Creek, and was appointed to Cabinet in June 2022. Minister Lumsden is a former star running back in the Canadian Football League. He was inducted into the Canadian Football Hall of Fame in 2014. Welcome, Minister Lumsden! OHS Staff and Directors look forward to working with you.



## MUSEUM MILESTONES

**Dr. John Carter**  
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The *OHS Bulletin* is widely circulated throughout Ontario. Museum Milestones provides a great forum to promote museums, heritage centres, and art galleries. As editor of this column, I try to include interesting articles by staff at these sites from across the province. The lead piece in this issue comes from Jill Nicholson, Curator of the Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association, located in Leamington. This museum has to be one of the most southerly in Ontario and in Canada. Check out Jill's article to learn all about this wonderful site.

Good news comes from another south-western museum, the Duff-Baby Mansion in Windsor. The City of Windsor has signed a lease agreement with the Ontario Heritage Trust (OHT), and this 224-year-old house will be open to the public for tours for the very first time. Les Amis Duff-Baby (incorporated by the OHS in 2013) will work with Museum Windsor to interpret the rich history of this building, which overlooks the Detroit River. Congratulations to all those involved in this exciting new initiative.

The John R. Park Homestead, located near Colchester, celebrates its 180th anniversary this summer. Completed in 1842, the homestead has been a very successful farmstead museum since opening to the public in

1977. A series of special events will be held during August. I recommend you plan a visit to enjoy this spectacular venue, which sits on the shore of Lake Erie.

It's always great to get feedback from readers. I received compliments from the Toronto Railway Museum, and the Canadian Clock Museum in Deep River for some of the coverage we did in previous editions of the *Bulletin*. Curator Allan Symons reminded me that a high-definition visual tour of his museum's exhibits is now available online. Access the site's home page and take a look at [these great images](#). And please continue to send me your comments.

In staffing news, Zack McLean was recently hired at the Owen Sound Community Waterfront Heritage Centre. Samantha Keller has left the John R. Park Homestead after serving there for five years as Senior Interpreter. Samantha is now teaching for the Greater Essex County District School Board. Katheryn Bezaire comes from the Ontario Railroad Museum in Capreol to replace her.

The Ontario museum/heritage community has recently lost two of its most senior and outstanding members. Dr. Rae Fleming, educator, local historian, and author passed away in April. Rae was actively involved with the Beaverton Thorah Eldon Historical Society, and was awarded the OHS Fred Landon Award for the best book on Ontario's regional history in 1992. He also was the editor of *Ontario History* in 2003–04. Dr. Douglas Leighton died in May. A long-time professor of History at Huron College, Western University, Doug was respected there as a gifted educator, mentor, and colleague. He was a Director of the OHS, and served as OHS President in 1987–89. Both Rae and Doug will be sorely missed. Sincere condolences to both their families

## PRESERVING MENNONITE HISTORY IN ESSEX-KENT

**Jill Nicholson**, Curator, Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association  
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The Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association (EKMHA) was formed to preserve the history of the Mennonites who came to the area starting in 1924–25. A group of German-speaking Mennonites left the Ukraine after the Bolsheviks took over their farms and factories in the Molotschna settlement and arrived at the port of Quebec in 1924. Over the next few years, Mennonites from other Ukrainian settlements came to Canada. The refugees moved on to Ontario and then to communities with Amish or Pennsylvania Dutch populations such as Markham, Waterloo, and Vineland. Some went on to Manitoba, where the first wave settled in the 1870s. Mennonites in Waterloo looked to other areas to resettle the newcomers and learned that workers were needed for the farms and brickyards of Essex County and Pelee Island. In the spring of 1925, a group arrived and settled in various communities in the southern part of Essex County. Shortly after their arrival, they established Mennonite congregations, which would later split into United Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren churches.

The Mennonites in Essex-Kent have demonstrated a strong desire to preserve their history. To achieve this, the congregations of the Leamington United Mennonite Church and the North Leamington United Mennonite Church established a committee in the late 1970s to review the preservation of historical artefacts. The committee published an overview of the church family in 1984 and began to actively collect historical materials. In the mid-1980s, the committee decided to expand the catchment area to include Essex and Kent Counties. The committee officially registered the group (with charitable status) as the Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association on May 1, 1987. The new board of directors included representatives from the various Mennonite churches in the area.



Exterior: Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association building.

The Board of Directors immediately started to plan for the establishment of a permanent location for the archives. Those dreams were realized in the spring of 1992, when EKMHA entered into an agreement with the Leamington Mennonite Home and Apartments to purchase 950 square feet of space for \$80,000 on a life-lease basis. The Heritage Centre was established on the second floor of the Heritage Gardens Apartments at 31 Pickwick Drive in Leamington. As the collection grew, EKMHA rented additional space in 2010 for archival materials on the first floor.

Today, the museum collection on the second floor includes personal and household items that were brought from Ukraine to Canada such as samovars, silk knitted clothing, and Ukrainian-style embroideries. To highlight the contributions that Mennonites have made to the agriculture in the area, items such as cream separators and small farming implements are displayed. A special feature in the museum is the miniature buildings built by volunteer Jake Lehn of his home, his farm, and the village of Sunnydale, Saskatchewan, and of the original Leamington United Mennonite Church and North Leamington United Mennonite Church. On the first floor, there are archival materials in both English and German such as family histories, church directories, registers, and bulletins, Mennonite histories, United Mennonite Educational Institute yearbooks, Mennonite-focused periodicals, files on local Mennonite organizations and individuals, Mennonite Church music books and hymnals, and maps of the Ukraine Mennonite colonies. Audio-visual materials available include videos, slides, and audio-cassettes. The cafe area also displays historical items and art work created by local Mennonites. Through special grants, EKMHA has developed digital collections, which are housed on our website [ekmha.ca](http://ekmha.ca) and on [virtualmuseums.ca](http://virtualmuseums.ca). At present, there is a photograph collection depicting Mennonite life on Pelee Island and a number of personal stories presented as audio recordings. More digital collections are planned in the near future.

Research on genealogy and Mennonite history is available upon request. A part-time curator and a group of dedicated volunteers oversee the operation of the Heritage Centre.

Along with the collection of materials, EKMHA volunteers were determined to put its history in print form. Over the years, a number of historical books have been written on topics such as the history of Mennonites in Essex County, Mennonites on Pelee Island, the Reesor settlement in Northern Ontario, and first-person accounts of local Mennonites' journeys in Canada. These books are available for purchase through the Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association.

In addition to the history mandate, the Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association's volunteers offer sponsored programs geared to the seniors who live in the various types of housing of the Leamington Mennonite Home and Apartments. These activities include a weekday cafe, travelogues, presentations by guest speakers, and tours. Other services provided in the Heritage Centre include weekly banking services, monthly public library visits, an in-house library, exercise groups, and health services.

During the pandemic, EKMHA's services and collections have been available virtually. Visit us at [ekmha.ca](http://ekmha.ca) to see our online collections and to find out more about our organization. EKMHA also has a presence on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). We welcome in person visits when restrictions allow with an appointment.

The Heritage Centre is the heart of both the history of the Mennonites in Essex-Kent and adjacent Mennonite seniors housing. We look forward to continuing our work for many years to come.



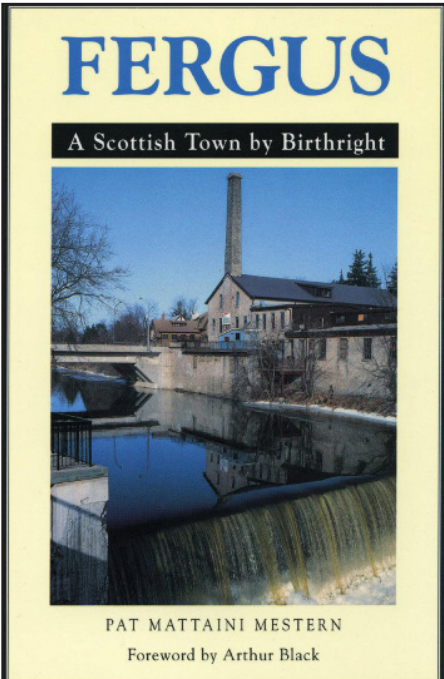
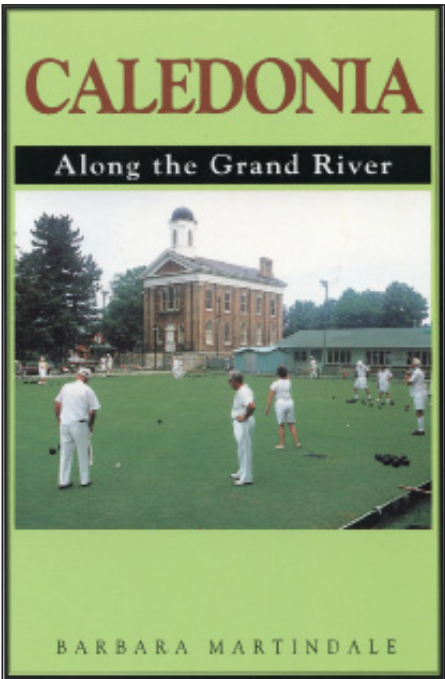
# BARRY PENHALE'S ONTARIO

## LARGER-THAN-LIFE CHARACTERS LIVE ON IN LOCAL HISTORY BOOKS

Barry Penhale

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As an aging writer, publisher, and neophyte podcaster, the road travelled thus far has found me continually rewarded by the bonafide characters I have encountered in our communities. Others are yet to be found in the surviving copies of “real” books that cram the bookshelves in the farmhouse I share with my wife, Jane Gibson. Visitors must wonder if they have entered a library or a bookshop, so loaded are those bookshelves, and among the stacked volumes are countless community histories — many of which I was privileged to bring into print. Just today, my fingers touched a copy of a modest-in-size but delightful-in-content book by Barbara Martindale, titled *Caledonia: Along the Grand River*. The author’s love of her community is evident in this slim volume and best viewed as an informal, even “unorthodox” capturing of small-town history. In it we are greeted with caring reminders of some of the most delightful characters one could ever hope to encounter, individuals once part of the fabric of her town.



In a section titled “Well Loved and Remembered,” Martindale introduces us to a person once a familiar fixture on the streets of Caledonia. Everyone called him “Tuffy.” It was not until his death in 1979 that many local people discovered his real name — Lloyd Culp. Tuffy was the one member of a local family who chose to live life on his own terms. A free spirit who generally wore two sets of clothing regardless of the season, he lived some distance from the heart of town, but could be spotted on the main streets almost daily, seldom without his trusty wagon. That town folk cared about Tuffy in many different ways is evident in the Gillespie family’s practice of always placing a cup of water outside should they be away when Tuffy stopped to visit.

Throughout his lifetime Tuffy came to regard the publisher of the Grand River Sachem as a very special friend and Harrison Martindale (Barbara’s father-in-law) always had time for his frequent visitor. It became a ritual for him to arm Tuffy with a list of fall fairs. Tuffy moved from fair to fair annually, travelling with the Marshall concession where he peeled potatoes, which he apparently did extremely well while connecting with old friends. (It is worth noting that for Caledonians, their annual fair is a much-cherished fall tradition dating back to October 15, 1873). Tuffy, however, had his health problems and, whenever medical attention was needed local doctors provided their services gratis right up to his passing. It was Sachem publisher Martindale who realized that Tuffy’s death marked the end of an era for the community. How fitting that he wrote and published a heartfelt obituary paying tribute to the deceased by including the following: “Our old friend will not be remembered for his monetary or material possessions, but rather he will be remembered as a familiar figure who walked alone, without malice or bitterness, and demanding so very little from the world in which he lived.”

Another author, Pat Mattaini Mestern, deserves to be commended for published writings that inform and entertain those readers who particularly enjoy Ontario history. Among a sizeable cluster of books by Mestern, is her very personal published account of her hometown, Fergus. Mestern has a delicious sense of humour and her lighter look at some of the characters and the escapades that added flavour to life in small-town Ontario make the book *Fergus: A Scottish Town by Birthright*, a delightful read. But there are more than ghost stories and accounts of “one-legged chickens” attached to Mestern’s

Fergus. The lady also takes history seriously and knows how to balance humour with a historical perspective richly augmented by oral history.

The foreword to Mestern’s book was penned by the well-known CBC broadcaster Arthur Black, at the time a Fergus resident and a character in his own right. The late, much-beloved humourist called the book “history with a human face.” He went on to say: “The book is occasionally naughty, always fascinating, and — my dour old history teacher at Fergus District High School must be grimacing in his grave — frequently hilarious.” Arthur was a colleague I first came to know when we both spent many hours in the old CBC Radio building on Toronto’s Jarvis Street. I was delighted when he attended the book launch in Fergus, and I think it safe to say that he would have taken great enjoyment once reading the author-autographed copy he left with that evening. It is highly probable Arthur burnt midnight oil that night, encountering the likes of the Scottish-born “curling-mad” Hugh Black, owner/operator of the immensely popular Black’s Tavern. Was he by any chance one of Arthur’s ancestors? Another colourful character, a remittance man who served bar at Black’s, was James “The Major” Edwards who doubled as a grave digger, and whose reputation for tippling was widely-known. Writing about Edwards in the chapter labelled “Wet or Dry,” the author begins a paragraph as follows: “He is reputed to have spent as much time in the grave as above it for he invariably fell into the hole he was digging.”

Ontario’s history is made up of colourful types. Some barely remembered, while others have left bigger footprints. Paris, on the Grand and Nith Rivers, was once home to a resident who called himself the “Bard of the Nith.” An eccentric sort, he had an equally interesting son who fancied himself an entertainer as he pulled a wagon around town with a loudly playing wind-up victrola. Such individuals, however, are not just part of small-town Ontario. Growing up in Toronto’s Junction district, I retain a vivid image of the then-familiar characters regularly spotted on Dundas Street West. One was a chubby fellow who fancied himself to be a detective. Never without a small writing pad and stubby pencil, upon entering places of business he would always ask shopkeepers the same questions before exiting, having made brief notes that seemed to satisfy him. He must have conducted hundreds of such investigations during my childhood, none of which did any harm. He was as much a part of the Junction as I was.

Such people have played their own part in building communities and have given our province a heritage that is anything but dull. They should not be forgotten.

### ...‘ARCHEION’ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Archeion’s 191 member institutions include municipalities, educational institutions, healthcare institutions, religious organizations, community archives, museums, historical societies, and libraries, range from small to large institutions, and are located all across the province. Some institutions collect historical records based on geographic location, while others collect based on the history of an organization, a community, or a particular subject.

As the AAO is always looking for more organizations wishing to join Archeion in order to share their collections with a wider audience. Archeion listings show up in Google search results, so collections move beyond the barriers of institutional catalogues and into the wider realm of online research. Records are also connected across institutions based on common places, subjects, names, and types of records to remove geographical barriers to cross-institutional research. A researcher can explore collections from Hearst to Amherstburg and from Thunder Bay to Iroquois, without ever leaving their desk.

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Museum		camh Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Archives	Ontario	Toronto	
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Community					
Educational Organization					
Healthcare Institution					
Library					
9					
GEOGRAPHIC SUBREGION					
All					
Toronto					
Ontario					
7					
5					

The AAO endeavours to continue growing Archeion’s membership and to broaden and diversify the collections described within the database, institutions such as The ArQuives, Canada’s LGBTQ2+ Archives; the Ottawa Jewish Archives; and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) Archives are just a few examples of archival repositories using Archeion to provide access to records that speak to a diversity of narratives in Ontario’s and Canada’s histories.

If you are interested in learning more about Archeion, either as a researcher or as someone representing a cultural heritage institution, feel free to contact me, Archeion Coordinator, Jazmine Aldrich, at [archeion@aao-archivists.ca](mailto:archeion@aao-archivists.ca).

Now, go forth and discover everything Archeion has to offer you!  
Archeion: <https://www.archeion.ca>  
AAO: <https://aao-archivists.ca>

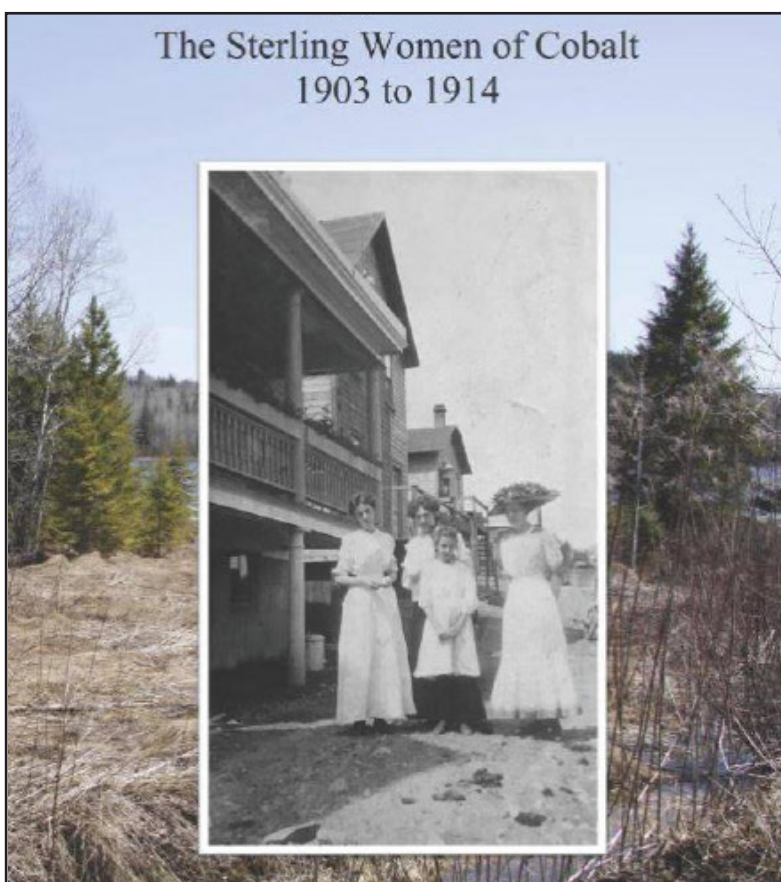


## FROM THE BOOKSHELF

**Dr. Cynthia Comacchio**  
ccomac5702@rogers.com

Summer is upon us, and it's time to relax, have the first real vacation many have been able to arrange since the pre-Covid days, and otherwise—hopefully—just kick back and enjoy the season most Ontarians long for during the other three. Whether the choice of leisure is camping, cottaging, resort, or “let's get out of Ontario,” for most who follow this column, reading is obviously on the agenda. If a staycation is planned, by choice and not by force of pandemic restrictions for a change, reading is probably an even bigger part of the break. In any case, the two local histories discussed below share some common traits. They are, first of all, richly detailed and beautifully illustrated, in large part with never-before-published photographs. Secondly, they are both revised, updated, enhanced, and republished versions of earlier, though still recent, editions. And, finally, they tell as much about ordinary people and their daily lives in small town Ontario as they do about the featured towns themselves. Together, life as lived, location, and the historical moment are intersecting elements of stories both extraordinary and ordinary—but never ever dull.

Grab one of these books, along with your cold beverage of choice, sunscreen, and, of course, mosquito repellent, and get started. Here's wishing OHS members a great summer, as it's bound to be after several consecutive Covid summers. And may some great reading be a key part of the “school's out” experience!



**DEBRA B. NORTH**

Kalmar Publishing, 2019.  
Paperback; 343 pp.  
[Available on Amazon.](#)

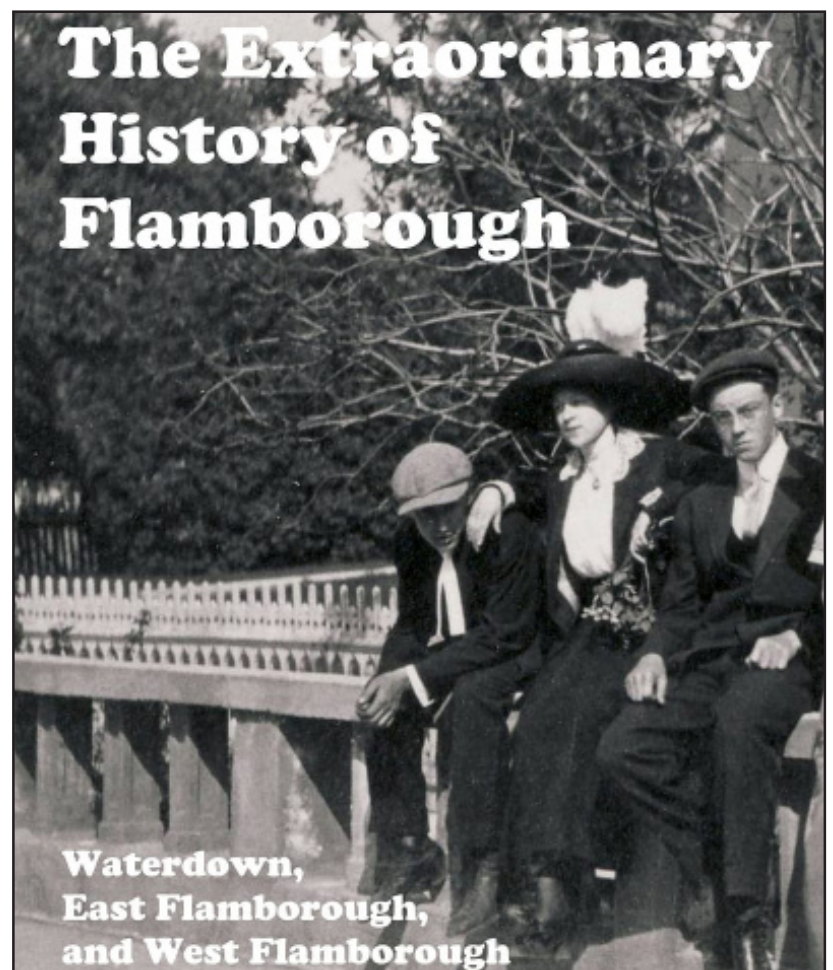
Pickering resident Debra B. North, a Registered Nurse who has a passion for history and photography, came to her subject through the gateway of genealogical research, as many of us do. While delving into her family story in the early twentieth-century resource community of Cobalt, she was intrigued by the ghostly presence of the town's women. They were there, working away as women do, many of them recent immigrants who arrived with their families of origin in hope of improving their prospects, marrying and raising children; others came already married and even with young families. More to the point, their stories made up a vital part of the town's history, yet they were seldom captured and set down by historians. In sum, the women of Cobalt had suffered the same fate as women everywhere until historians like North made a conscious effort to find them and talk about them.

This book consists of the stories, some just intriguing snippets because little more could be found, of some 45 women, all of whom bear some familial connection to the author. The Sterling women of the title came to live in the town during a period of rapid development in the province, and the town itself, between 1904 and 1914. The book focuses on two moments of impressive socioeconomic expansion in the town, commencing with the discovery of a rich vein of silver that kicked off a frenzy rivalled only by the Klondike gold rush. What happened between them included the disruptions, as well as the benefits, of rapid modernization, with unprecedented overseas emigration,

the advances wrought by modern science and technology in both home and work, including the darker side of these, such as worker exploitation and unrest, and, of course, the enormous shockwaves brought about by the Great War that pushed Canada into modernity. Looking at how these affected this northern community by means of the historical biographies of some of its women provides a much-needed gendered perspective that also touches, as it must, on class, race, religion, and family. What stands out most about this remarkable collection of life narratives, put together from documentary and photographic evidence and oral histories, is the range of women's experiences that the author has uncovered. The opening chapter discusses the “firsts”: 49-year-old Catherine Legris, herself of Irish and French Canadian descent and married to a French Canadian, along with their children, were the first to homestead in the area. Also included are the biographies of the first nurse, Annie Saunders, and the first teacher, Elizabeth McEwan. North considers the more unusual stories of some otherwise “typical” middle-class wives and mothers, including what was likely the most unusual of all in that time, the story of Blanche Toy, who arrived in Canada from Germany in 1908 and married a Chinese immigrant 14 years her senior. A chapter looks at the female inhabitants of “Frenchtown” and “Finntown” as well as the women of the even more acutely racialized Syrian minority.

North offsets the stories of five of the mine managers' wives, the town's elite, with those of women who worked for their own upkeep or to contribute to shaky family economies. These include employees of various ranks, from servants through clerks and telegraph operators, through female boardinghouse keepers and small business owners and prostitutes. In a section dedicated to the women who lived outside the town limits, she recounts the life of her own grandmother, Rachel Johnston Ferris. A courageous and ambitious young woman, she left her impoverished working-class family in Glasgow to marry her fiancé William Ferris in Canada in 1906 after a seven-year engagement, most of which he had spent fighting in South Africa and then working in Toronto before heading to the Cobalt silver mines not long before her arrival. Their one-room shack at Cross Lake was a two-kilometre hilly walk from the town. With few neighbours, and those at some distance, she found the strength and perseverance to tend to, feed, clothe, and educate her children, while doing much of the household labour as the Ferris family made its way forward in a harsh and often dangerous environment. Her story, as North can attest, typifies the hard lives of “ordinary women” in that place and that time.

This book is amply illustrated with about 200 black and white photographs that offer visual evidence of so much for which we otherwise have no record. The Sterling Women of Cobalt is an excellent book to dip into or pore over, to to examine historic photos, to learn from, and simply to enjoy.



**NATHAN TIDRIDGE**

Waterdown: Waterdown-East Flamborough Heritage Society, 2022,  
Paperback; 296 pp.  
<https://flamboroughhistory.com>

Flamborough Township, comprising Waterdown and East and West Flamborough, has come in for its share of historical attention in the past

**'FROM THE BOOKSHELF' CONTINUED ON PAGE 8...**



few years; readers might recall that I reviewed Jonathan Vance’s award-winning homefront history *A Township at War* when it was published in 2018. Vance, whose support is acknowledged in the preface, focused on the residents’ involvement in the Great War, and its impact on them and their community. In this book, Nathan Tidridge provides a chronological overview of the township from its Indigenous origins. Also like Vance, Tidridge, who teaches history at Waterdown District High School, has deep familial roots in the area. He grew up in the town, as did his wife, and they returned there to raise their own children. In both instances, as in Debra B. North’s project, it is evident that this personal connection is not only a vital source of inspiration but also serves up the kind of passion that animates the histories recounted.

*The Extraordinary History of Flamborough* is the “Jubilee edition” of Tidridge’s earlier community history, intended to honour Queen Elizabeth II’s platinum jubilee marking 70 years on the throne, an event whose pageantry was witnessed by many in early June. That already comprehensive work is here updated and enhanced, with fuller attention to the area’s non-Settler population, especially its Indigenous and Black peoples. The author asserts that this volume is not merely an update, however. It is, in his words, “a complete overhaul” of a work that represents what can only be called an extraordinary commitment of time and energy on his part. All the while, Tidridge has been actively transmitting his knowledge and enthusiasm to generations of young people in his “day job” teaching history at Waterdown District High School—no small task. This book, then, is “extraordinary” in any number of ways!

Especially notable in the Jubilee edition is the enlarged discussion of pre-European development, the township’s true social origins. Tidridge’s first chapter, aptly titled “Beginning a Conversation,” sets out to support what is, hopefully, the unquestioned if fairly recent awareness that, as he asserts, “Indigenous Voices Must Be Heard.” The book opens with a critical discussion—critical in that he also raises the matter of why their history has so long been neglected—about the area’s “long relationship” with the Neutral, Haudenosaunee, Anishnabe, and Wendat nations. He notes how archaeologists have uncovered material evidence of Indigenous peoples in the area as far distant historically as 7500 BCE. Waterdown’s Souharissen Natural Area, named for the leader of the Neutral Nation, was established to preserve the key sites. The original inhabitants’ relationship with waves of Europeans began in the 17th century with the establishment of the Covenant Chain between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Dutch Crown. This trade relationship, ostensibly creating a partnership of sovereign nations, was continued by Britain after the Dutch defeat in 1664. It is still the foundation of all Treaty Relationships in and beyond the Great Lakes region (5).

The devastating fights for the land that fuelled English-French wars are fairly common knowledge; Tidridge points out that the Neutral, a nation of as many as 40,000 people, had been virtually wiped out by the 1650s, thanks to the spread of European diseases such as smallpox, and the ongoing European battles over fur (the Beaver Wars) that pitted Indigenous communities against each other. From that point, and despite a number of important treaties, the major groups—the Mississaugas of the Credit Valley and the Haudenosaunee—were further colonized in the

name of “civilization.” As the second chapter, on European settlement, explains, once the first true “settlers” arrived, around 1783, the treaties signified little in the face of the sheer onslaught of people accustomed to private property ownership and eager to push the inhabitants to the margins in order to secure it. Upper Canada’s first Lieutenant Governor, John Graves Simcoe, played a crucial role in undermining the Treaty relationship, as the Crown’s representatives were mandated to do. Further disruptions and devastation followed in the wake of American incursions into Upper Canada, especially during the War of 1812. The Mississaugas were rewarded for their losses in fighting on the Crown’s side with nothing beyond the little they already had in terms of land rights.

It is impossible, of course, to summarize the vast amount of research and the many subjects, developments, and actors that the author covers in this compendium. His discussion of the township’s Black community, also a new addition, is worth noting, however, because we are still in such preliminary stages when it comes to Black history in Ontario. Tidridge refers to the possibility that Sarah Pooley, a woman born into slavery in New York, was the first non-Indigenous and non-White person in the area. Pooley was brought to Niagara by Mohawk captain of the British army Joseph Brant into a typical slave life of hard work and harsh punishment. She was then sold to another British captain and ended her life a free woman in Waterloo County, probably due to the *Slavery Abolition Act* of 1834, though also her owners’ volition, since the Act did not legislate the freeing of those already enslaved. Her story is one of those collected in Benjamin Drew’s famous 1856 anti-slavery tract, *The Refugee; Or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada* (38).

Closer to our own times, Tidridge outlines a chronology of and discusses the major developments in the suburbanization of the area. This was not, of course, peculiar to Flamborough in the post Second World War years. It was part of a national wave, especially in light of the notorious Baby Boom that began in 1947 and petered out around 1964. Industrialization, the pull of urbanization that saw vast growth in neighbouring Hamilton and nearby Toronto, and the postwar wave of immigration and construction, saw rural areas in southwestern Ontario inexorably affected. The author especially zeros in on the highly controversial “forced amalgamation” of the township into the municipality of Hamilton, which he dubs “The Harris Chainsaw Massacre,” in honour of its chief perpetrator, the oft-lamented former Conservative premier Mike Harris, famous for his “common sense revolution.” The story continues with such highlights as the arrival of the world-shaking, epoch-making internet in Waterdown and the all-too-recent past measures taken to battle Covid locally.

Like North’s, Tidridge’s book is lavishly illustrated with more than 150 colour plates, maps, charts, and photographs. This is a “must read” for the township’s residents and or those who grew up there or otherwise have a personal connection. But it is also an important and valuable addition to the bookshelves of all who want to know more about how the most densely populated area of the province, its southwest, came to be. As a bonus, all proceeds from book sales will be donated to the Flamborough Heritage Society, a cause dear to the hearts of the Ontario Historical Society.

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PAGE 8

OHS BULLETIN

AUGUST 2022