# NEWS and views

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Simcoe County Historical Association

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# In this issue...

Fall at SCHA 1
Bertrams 1, 3-4
Fall Meetings 1
SCHA Executive 2
President's Report 2
Places in Time 2
Dambusters 4
We Must Have 5-6
Upcoming OMAH 6
Book Launch 7
Bridge that Moved 7
Registering History 7
Coming Events 8

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# Visit our Website

www.simcoecountyhistory.ca



Preserving the Past, in the Present, for the Future.

# **Fall at SCHA**

This fall provides our SCHA membership with a variety of speakers and presentations. Great detail for all three events is provided in the following pages. We hope to see you there!

SCHA proudly salutes Les Bertram & Sons Ltd, the first in a series of long-term Simcoe County businesses to be recognized in the coming months.

# **Building Excellence since 1939**

Join us at Minesing Hall on September 22 at 2 p.m. to hear two generations of Bertrams share their story of commitment and adaptability; proven skills which have kept the business thriving for nearly 80 years.

You will be amazed at the number and variety of buildings built by Bertrams during this period of time.

# The History of Les Bertram & Sons Ltd by Gary Bertram

We thank-you for the opportunity to be involved with this project and we have provided an overview description for the beginnings of the company. Changes have occurred as the years have passed but we have provided in more detail the philosophies that have remained the same and what has changed to continue in the construction business.

Les (Leslie Howard) Bertram started as a carpenter in 1927 and established a company with one of his brothers in the 1930s. In 1939, Les Bertram started his own company with full employment for eight men in

Continued on page 3

# **SCHA Fall Meetings**

Saturday, September 22 2 p.m. Bertram Brothers story at the Minesing Hall

**Tuesday, October 23** 7:30 p.m. Ted Barris on the Dambusters at the Barrie Legion

**Tuesday, November 13** 7:30 p.m. Danielle Kostrich on the research for the drama "We Must Have More Men" at the Huronia Room, Barrie City Hall

The SCHA acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Ontario through the Ministry of Culture.



# **Simcoe County Historical Association Executive**

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# For membership information, contact

Judith Banville

membership@simcoecountyhistory.ca

You are invited to submit photos and articles regarding your historical happenings in Simcoe County. Mail to SCHA, Box 144, Barrie, ON L4M 4S9 or email to Jill Hynes, Editor at mark.jill@sympatico.ca

# President's Report by Ted Duncan

As your President, I welcome you to a new season of activities in our Association. Elsewhere in this newsletter you will notice that our Speaker Series returns.

We are trying something new with our first event on September 22. We will not be having a speaker as such but will be celebrating the history of a whole company, Les Bertram & Sons. Our Secretary Donna Wice brought this idea forward and is making it happen. Please check the time and place for this interesting program. Don't forget our other Speakers for October and November too.

The writing of History is very important to us as well. We are

working with the Simcoe Review to promote historical writers in our County. There were great articles in the February issue on the County's first Judge, Sir James Gowan; in the May issue on Anson Dodge, County Lumber Baron; and the July issue on the visit to Orillia of Pawnee Bill's Wild West Show in 1893. If you have an idea for a story, please contact us as we are looking for articles. I'd like to thank John Merritt for taking the lead on this on behalf of the SCHA.

The History Fair for student historians was a great success at the Simcoe County Museum this spring. We sponsored awards again this year. Thanks again to John Merritt for being our representative and judging at the event too.

I like to thank our hard working Board members for their work on behalf of History in our County. Besides those already mentioned, Mark Fisher our Vice President, Deb Exel as Treasurer/Webmaster and Judith Banville are always ready to get the necessary jobs done. It goes without saying but I will say it; Jill Hynes does a great job putting out our newsletter.

Come join us. Many hands make light work. We can do even more promoting and protection our History with your help.

# Places In Time: A Nostalgic Walking Tour of Downtown Barrie

Don't miss this opportunity to celebrate the second anniversary of Barrie's only online museum, the Barrie Historical Archive.

Beginning at noon on September 26, the archive's resident historian, storyteller and BarrieToday.com columnist, Mary Fletcher Harris, will lead patrons through places in time throughout the city's downtown core, rain or shine.



The tour will culminate with coffee, cookies, camaraderie and conversation at Homestead Artisan Bakery + Cafe. Email info@barriearchive.ca to let event organizers know you plan on attending!

# **History of Les Bertram & Sons** continued

the spring. However, by the fall, he pany and forming the name as it is businesses came to the area makwas left with just himself as all the called today 'Les Bertram & Sons ing varied types of work available. men hired were either called up to (1985) Limited'. In 1985, Jim Ber- The company adapted to the war or enlisted to the start of tram Sr. and his sons Jim Jr. and changing area by offering a variety World War II. Les found work on Steve started a separate company of construction techniques and Base Borden for a short period of called Jim Bertram & Sons Con- searching out new building types. time and then when the war ended struction Inc., providing crane and The challenge was to remain found carpentry work elsewhere. heavy equipment services. In 1991 adaptable and learn additional After World War II and into the Bill & Sandra (Olive) Bertram be- skills if we wanted to work mainly 1950s, the company mainly found came owners of the company. In in the Simcoe County area. work in the agricultural sector. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the late 1950s and into the mid Bill's sons all became full time 1960s the company was employing employees in the business and upbetween three and twenty men on on Bill's retirement in 2010, Gary project sites for West Steele.

The company located to a permanent shop in 1955 in Midhurst on In 2016 the company moved to a have become an award winning ited company and expanded to (Lee) Bertram realigned the comconstructing new schools, com- pany to become owners. Their son, mercial, industrial buildings, and Ryan, a fourth generation family provided equipment services as member, is now a full time empart of the compliment to general ployee and is learning the family contracting. By then, three of four general contracting business. of Les' sons were involved full time in the business (Ron, Jim, & Bill), and into the 1970s the fourth son came to work full time, (Peter).

# Les Bertram

Les' work ethic was tenacious and sometimes the hard work rubbed off on your demeanor. From a previous quote Les said, "If you ask people I've dealt with over the years if I was a tough character, they'd tell you I was. But I was honest, honest with every person I've ever worked.'

Les was from a generation where a person was only as good as their word and as far as he was concerned, a person's word in early times was all there was. If Les bid on a contract and he quoted a price that was it, no matter what problem might creep into the mix.

In the 1980s, after 45 years, Les Bertram retired and the company realigned ownership with Ron and Bill becoming owners of the com-

& Geoff Bertram assumed ownership.

Hwy 26 & 27 which is now called new location in Midhurst at 13 builder with the Robertson and Bayfield Street North. In the Bertram Industrial Parkway, and have continued to offer this build-1960s, the company became a lim- later that year, Gary and Sandra ing to our customers for 41 years.



The success of the company has been a willingness to personalize our work to the owner's specific use of the building in all sectors of buildings (agricultural and ICI). We pride ourselves on offering thorough honest quotations and still believe and practice Les's values of honouring your word.

Looking back, the company first started out when the Barrie area was around 6,000 people and as the area and County grew, new

In 1977, Les Bertram and Sons, became a Pre-Engineered building dealership with Robertson Building Systems, offering an alternative building design to conventionally constructed buildings. We

The approach now is similar to Grandpa (Les) & Dad (Bill) in that you must obtain the experience of a wide variety of building practices to be confident in your decisions and rely on your learned instinct. Sound building practices and a persistent good work ethic get you through new building challenges or designs, plus allowed the company to survive in the construction industry.

Today, as Les Bertram & Sons reflects on its 80<sup>th</sup> year in the construction industry, our goal is to build environmentally responsibly but cost effectively and continue to learn new practices. Ryan has recently been working on expanding the company to include a new division for residential construction, a building sector not previously explored. We are in the early stages of development and are looking forward to this venture.

Over the decades, we have continued the practice to be honest builders providing a good quality building using proven construction prac-

# History of Les Bertram & Sons continued

tices that will provide a long lasting value to the owner. This has been a foundation belief passed on by all generations of Bertrams and will carry on into the future.



# **Key Projects:**

1939 – 1950s Agricultural Buildings

1960s - Baxter Laboratories, Duntroon Public School, Simcoe County Museum, St. John Paul School, Forest Hill Public School, Sun Oil Company -Midland, Midhurst Municipal Building, R.K. Beattie Farms Alliston

1970s – Army Navy Air Force Club, Hitch House, Barrie Plumbing – Parry Sound Stewart Esten, Midhurst MNR Office Building, Georgian Manor -Penetanguishene, Minesing Firehall, Simcoe County Museum

1980s - Tay Township Community Centre, Taylor Machine, St. Mary's Catholic E.S. Barrie Big Bay Point Firehall #3, Forest Hill Public School Addition, CFB Borden 0-95 Addition, Royal Victoria Hospital numerous projects, Currie Truck Centre - Midhurst

1990s - South Shore Community Centre, BDO Dunwoody Building, SPS Alliston Plant 1 & 2 Rama Mnjikaning Office Building, Gibson Transport, Hitch House Addition

2000s - OPPA Association Barrie, Adams Funeral Home, R.K. Beattie Farms, Alliston, Knock School Heritage Site, CFB Borden O-111, Penetanguishene Hospital, Midland District Hospital

2010 to Present - Eagle Ridge Professional Complex, Barrie Community Health Centre, Georgian Radiology Consultants, Linear Transfer Automation, Springwater Health Centre, Alliance Agri-turf Complex - Baxter

## Long standing commitment

Les Bertram retired at age 72 and worked in the business for 45 years

Sons - Bill Bertram 43 years, Jim Bertram Sr., 29 years, Ron Bertram 27 years, Peter Bertram 8 years

**Employees - Nadine Chestnut 25** plus years, Bill Kirk 25 plus years

Grandsons – Geoff Bertram 20 vears

Current employees Gary Bertram 30 years (Grandson), Brad Adams 29 years

# Customer and dealership long standing relationships:

Jim Bertram & Sons Construction Inc. 1985 to present (33 years)

Robertson Pre-Engineered Building System Dealer 1977 to present (41 years)

CanSave Supply and Distribution1997, 2005 Addition, 2010 Addition, and 2016 Addition (19 years)

Garaga Inc. Barrie 1998, 2005 Addition, 2017 Addition (18 years)

# Dambusters at the October Meeting

jointly with the Barrie Legion at off on a night mission code-named their Hall at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Operation Chastise. Hand-picked October 23. The featured speaker and specially trained, the Lancaster will be the renowned and highly crews flew at treetop level to the entertaining Ted Barris. He will industrial heartland of the Third give a presentation based on his re- Reich and their targets, the Ruhr cently published book, Dambusters, River dams, whose massive water and the night that changed the reservoirs powered Nazi Germany's World War II. The secret air raid military industrial complex. against the hydroelectric dams of Germany's Ruhr River took years to plan, involved an untried bomb and included the best aircrews the RAF Bomber Command could muster, many of them Canadian. The raid marked the first time the Allies successfully took the war inside Nazi Germany. It was a mission that became legendary.

the SCHA and BHA will be held bombers filled with 133 airmen took

Each Lancaster carried an explosive that, when released just 60 feet over the reservoirs, bounced like a skipping stone to the dam, sank and exploded. The raiders breached two dams and severely damaged a third. The resulting torrent devastated power plants, factories and infra-

The second meeting of the fall for On May 16, 1943, 19 Lancaster structure a hundred miles downstream.

> Every one of the 133 airmen on the mission understood that the odds of survival were low. Of the 19 bombers outbound, eight did not return. Operation Chastise cost the lives of 53 airmen, including 14 Canadians. Of the 16 RCAF men who survived, seven received military decorations.

> Based on personal accounts, flight logs, maps and photographs of the Canadians involved, Dambusters recounts the dramatic story of these Commonwealth bomber young crews who were tasked with a highrisk mission against an enemy prepared to defend the Fatherland to the death.

# Archeologist more than Sculptor: The Writing of "We Must Have More Men! Barrie and the Great War" by Danielle Joy Kostrich

Danielle Kostrich will be our speaker November 13 discussing the play and sharing additional photos. See page 1 for details.

SCHA supported Theatre by the Bay's production with a Community Partnership grant.

It was the summer of 2015 when the Artistic Director of Theatre by the Bay Alex Dault sat me down in Casa Cappuccino. "I want to do a play about Barrie during the First World War," he said. "Will you help me write it?" So began a year of intense research and unexpected passion.

When we began the project, I wasn't what you would call a self-professed history-lover. In fact, I worried at first that researching my hometown of Barrie one hundred years ago might be... boring.

I couldn't have been more wrong.



How do you write a play based on local history? We gave ourselves three months to collect as much information as we could. As it turns out, Alex and I are

well-matched as research partners. Alex is an absolute hobby historian; he loves the big picture, the moving parts of government and military. It is his love of history that drives TBTB's new mandate - Local Stories, Local Artists - and has led our company each season to produce at minimum one original local work for over five years running. While he read up on Canada's role as a dominion of the British Empire and the politics of the time, I went deep into the everyday life of our city's people. I hunted for personal stories, waiting for characters to emerge.

I began where I thought it most sensible: at our war memorial. I remember that summer day, feeling a bit foolish as I walked up to the centre pillar and took photos with my phone, treading carefully as I captured all four sides, each inscribed with dozens of names. It was the last time I looked at the memorial with any sense of levity. Now, I recognize those names. They are real people. I know their stories.

I searched each name online on the Collections Canada database. Some names didn't turn up in the search. For some, three or four soldiers of the same name came back, with no way to tell who was the man from Barrie. Most entries had a scarce combination of details: birth date, enlistment date, death date, and battalion. Sometimes the website offered a sentence or two more - a medal won or a spouse's name. It wasn't much to go on. Still, the more names I looked up, the more a story began to surface.

Alex and I spoke to local historian Clint Lovell, who graciously shared some of his research with us from his soon-to-be-released book Regret to Inform You. We read Su Murdoch's Beautiful Barrie, and Streetwise in Barrie by Brad Rudachyk. Alex developed a partnership with the Grey and Simcoe Foresters. We stumbled upon letters, war diaries, training songs and poems written by soldiers from Barrie. Barrie's Red Cross Branch and its outstanding contributions to the war effort came up again and again in our research. Between the two of us, we read nearly every local paper between 1914 and 1918 (from the comfort of our homes. thanks to the online archives at the Barrie Public Library). It quickly became clear that we had more stories than we could use. We could have written ten plays. Some of my favourite, most heartbreaking stories are left out of the final piece, but they still sing in my heart.

With every edit, we had to cut characters, streamline the storytelling, and make it manageable. We knew our cast would be no more than ten actors. How to portray a whole community with only ten bodies, let alone a war effort? The more we wrote, the more we realized that the story we were telling was about relationships. It wasn't just about the men who went to war; in fact, Barrie's story seemed to be more about the women who stayed behind to keep the home fires burning.



Continued on page 6

# Archeologist more than Sculptor continued

What emerged were four pairs of characters: a politician and a suffragette, a mother and a son, two lovers, and two friends, barely out of childhood, forced to grow up in wartime. The remaining two actors would play all the other roles required to fill out the storyline. These contrasting perspectives combined to give us a snapshot of our little town during WWI – the larger struggles of honour, religion, and women's rights pressed on top of dai-

# **Upcoming OMAH Events**

The History Committee at the Orillia Museum of Art and History (OMAH) is excited about the upcoming 2018/2019 season. A dynamic list of speakers and topics are on the docket. Stay tuned.

Gwen Robinson, Chair of the Coldwater Mill Heritage Foundation, and winner of the 2015 OMAH History Award in Preservation the Heritage Category, starts us off on October 17. The Coldwater Mill Heritage Foundation and the community are dedicated to preserving the heritage of the Coldwater Mill. a Landmark Grist Mill constructed in 1833-1834 for the Oiibwa. Join us to hear Gwen speak about the



ly stresses to provide food, hope, and community.

The play was a great success. In 2016, our two-week run at Trinity Anglican Church had sold out performances, leaving many unable to see the show. So, we remounted the production in November 2017. The second time, our show ran a four-week tour from Barrie to Base Borden to Collingwood, with nearly 2000 members of the public and over 1000 students in Simcoe County as our audience. We've had people remark that the play could be a yearly offering; its stories are so compelling, so important to our community. I almost feel as though I can't take credit. The play wrote itself, really. The stories were there; we only laid them out together. I suppose that's how it is when you write about history – you're the archeologist more than the sculptor. And I'll never say that local history is boring again.

successes and challenges encountered by the Indigenous People and subsequent owners. In 1995 a demolition permit was granted for the Mill. Unable to find a buyer, the owner began selling it off piece by piece and was preparing to have the Landmark torn down. Learn about how the community came together and purchased the Mill in 1995 to save it from demolition. Also learn about a recent addition to the Mill and other exciting changes enabled by a Canada 150 grant, as well as how the Mill continues to serve the community.

On November 21 we welcome artist, historian and author Joanna McEwen as guest speaker. Joanna will regale us with "Tales from the Historic Penetanguishene

Road." She will speak about the settlement on Simcoe County's oldest surveyed road give an will and insider glimpse of the interesting characters settled who there. Joanna has written several books on local

history. Through her research, Joanna has achieved a mastery of detail and local colour of the era, giving us an appreciation of the characters and their lives.

The speakers and topics for 2019 range from Evelyn Ross "Fleeing Nazi Europe" in January to Ann Harrison in February with her topic The Underground Railway in celebration of Black History Month. Acclaimed Orillia-born author Rachel McMillan will tell the story of writer Lucy Maude Montgomery's experiences in Muskoka that inspired her life and work. We also welcome back the students from the Orillia Secondary School. They will share their research about the Orillia Soldiers who fought on D-Day and about their trip to Juno Beach. This is just a sampling of upcoming series.

The OMAH History Committee thanks everyone for making the 2017/2018 History Speaker Series a success with record attendance and looks forward to seeing everyone in October. The talks start at 7:30 p.m. Admission is free. Donations to OMAH are welcome.

# OMAH Book Launch: Saturday, September 29 2 p.m.

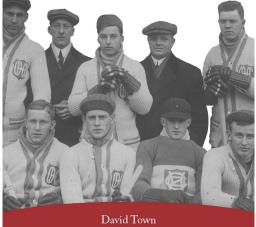
Ask anyone in Orillia who our BUT....thanks to David Town's greatest team was and you'll inev- thorough research and passion for itably hear about the 1973 Terriers local sports history, now they do! hockey team who won the Allan Join us at OMAH on Saturday Cup as Canadian amateur champi- September 29 to meet David ons. You might even hear about Town and learn more about this the teams who won three consecutive be available for purchase. Mann Cups as Canadian amateur lacrosse champions. But no one will mention the 1913-15 Orillia Younkers hockey team, a group of young men who rallied the town around them in unprecedented fashion with three Ontario hockey championships. Orillia was "hockey mad" during those Younkers campaigns -5 years of rowdy boosterism. But today, 100 years later, nobody even knows they existed.

1934-36 Terriers lacrosse great hockey team. Books will

We are proud to launch the first book published by OMAH through the Mulcahy Publishing Initiative. The purpose of the Mulcahy Publishing Initiative is to acknowledge and honour the Mulcahy family for their support of OMAH and to facilitate and encourage the annual creation of a written publication about an aspect of the history of the Orillia area.

ORILLIA'S GREATEST HOCKEY TEAM





# The Bridge That Moved by Ted Duncan



The Bridge at the Atherley Narrows was built in 1895 and crossed the Narrows until 1925 when it was moved after a swing bridge was built.

Was it to Waubaushene? The story goes that it was! Are there historians out there with more information on this?

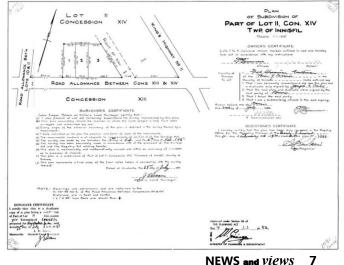


# **Registering History** by Barrie Historical Archive

Perhaps you saw a copy of it in your lawyer's office, before purchasing a new house. Or maybe you saw one at City Hall, a long, long time ago.

Land registry maps recently digitized by members of the Barrie Historical Archive offer us cartographical insight into thousands of photos treasured in the online archive. The moment that grandiose lots - farms, forests, estates were split and made way for the homes of hundreds is documented.

Now, we're proud that more of these treasures, unearthed from the city's registry, are making their way into the Barrie Historical Archive. Have you wondered how your property came to be? Wonder no more - go find your place on the map at barriearchive.ca.



# **Coming Events of Member Societies**

### **Alliston Historical Society**

Contact Jackie Baillie 705-435-5626 cknowles@rogers.com Meet at Museum on the Boyne 2 p.m. 2nd Wednesday Feb-June, Oct-Nov

### **Barrie Historical Archive**

barriearchive.ca Contact Deb Exel info@barriearchive.ca

**Barrie Historical Association** barriehistorical.com Contact Mark Fisher

# Bradford/West Gwillimbury

Historical Association Bradford.library.on.ca/?page\_id=311 Contact Bill Marks 905-775-6179 Meet at BWG Library 2 p.m. 4th Saturday Jan-May, Sept-Nov

## Coldwater Canadian Heritage Museum

coldwatermuseum.com

# Collingwood District Historical Society

historicallyspeakingcdhs.ca Contact Joan Miller 705-445-1119 Meet at Leisure Time Club 7 p.m. **Oct. 1** *Dorothy Duncan* Feasting and Famine **Nov. 5** *Steven Glover* The Final Days of the Great War

### Collingwood Museum

collingwood.ca/museum Contact Susan Warner 705-445-4811 **Oct. 1** *Laurel Lane Moore* Ghosts of Houses Past

### **Essa Historical Society**

Contact Olive Lee 705-458-9971 teddylee1@rogers.com Meet at Thornton Library 1:30 p.m. 4th Saturday Jan-June, Sept-Nov

### **Friends of Fort Willow**

nvca.on.ca/recreation/ ConservationAreas/FortWillow **Sept. 29** Festival at the Fort 10-4 Free shuttle bus runs to and from the Grenfel Community Hall (1989 Sunnidale Rd.) all day

### Friends of the OPP Museum

oppmuseumfriends.ca Contact Matt Eade 705-330-4178 support@oppmuseumfriends.ca **Sept. 30** Pedal (and Run) for the Past at St. Marie Among the Hurons

### Huronia Museum/Huron Ouendat Village huroniamuseum.com

705-526-2844

### **Innisfil Historical Society**

http://www.ourstoriesinnisfil.ca/IHSabout Contact Donna Wice Meet at Knock Comm Centre 2 p.m. **Sept. 15** *A dam Shoalts* Stories of the North

### Museum on the Boyne

Contact Katie Huddleston-Naieb 705-435-3900 ext. 1802

### **Orillia History Speaker Series**

Contact Ted Duncan Meet at Orillia Museum 7:30 p.m.

Oct. 17 Gwen Robinson The Coldwater Mill 1833, Then and Now Nov. 21 Joanna McEwen Tales from the Historic Penetanguishene Road Orillia Museum of Art and

### History orilliamuseum.org 705-326-2159 to Sept. 23 Dave Beckett Retrospective Sept. 22-Jan. 6 From the Ashes: Orillia's Fires

Opening Reception Sept. 22 1-3

### Penetanguishene Centennial Museum and Archives

penetanguishene.ca/en/Museum.asp?
mid\_=23034
Contact Nicole Jackson
705-549-2150
Sept. 22 Fish Fry Fundraising
Dinner
Sept. 29 Fall Harvest Craft Sale
and Doors Open 10-3
Oct. 12 Meet the Spirits at the St.
James on the Lines Cemetery
7 or 8 p.m. tours
Oct. 27 Spooktacular Events 2-4

### **Ramara Historical Society**

http://ramarahistoricalsociety.ca/ Contact Cathy Westcott westcott.cathy963@gmail.com Meet at Udney Community Centre 7 p.m. 3rd Thurs Jan-June, Sept-Dec Sept. 20 Howard Black Member Show & Tell of Vintage Beekeeping Items Oct. 18 Doug Cooper Member Show & Tell of local Ramara artwork Nov. 15 Annual General Meeting David Town Two Remarkable Orillians in W.W.I: Mert Plunkett of The Dumbbells and Sir Samuel Steele – The Ignominious End of His Career in W.W.I Member Show & Tell of Vintage Military Items Dec. 13 Christmas Potluck / Social 6:00 p.m. at Udney Community Centre

### Simcoe County Branch,

Genealogical Society simcoe.ogs.ca Contact Nancy Leveque Meet at Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints 2 p.m. Oct. 13 James Thompson Scottish Research Nov. 3 Joanna McEwen Stained Glass in Local Churches

### Simcoe County Museum

museum.simcoe.ca Contact Kelly Swift-Jones 705-728-3721 **Sept. 14-16** Quilt, Rug and Craft Fair **Oct. 13** Last Blast 10-4

### **Stayner Heritage Society**

staynerheritagesociety.com Contact Tom Scholte 705-517-5171

### **Tecumseth & West Gwillimbury Historical Society** Contact Patricia Blackstock

416-247-6551 Meet at TecWeGwill Hall 7:30 3rd Monday Jan-May, Sept-Nov