

NEWS views

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Simcoe County Historical Association

Vol. 47, No. 3
ISSN 0700-4427

In this issue...

SCHA Fall 1
 SCHA Executive 1
 President's Report ... 2
 Essa 40th 2
 SCA New Hours 2
 Beattie Story 3
 SCHA Award 3
 Lake Simcoe 4
 Oro Settlement 5
 Asset or Landfill? 6
 Drury 200th 6
 Letita Magee 7
 Cemetery Guards .. 7-9
 Fall at SCM 9
 Coming Events 10

Contact the editor, Jill Hynes at news@simcoecountyhistory.ca

Visit our Website

www.simcoecountyhistory.ca
[Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#)

SCHA Fall Meetings

Welcome to the Fall Speakers Series at the SCHA. We look forward to informing the membership about the history of the Beatties of Alliston, as described in detail on page 3. Spending our October meeting on their property will be a unique and enjoyable change of pace for our group! Please find all the information for time, date, location and directions on page 3 of this issue.

At our November meeting, we will welcome Evelyn Ross with her presentation of the history of her parents' escape from Nazi Germany. Details regarding the date, time and location will be made available at the October meeting and on our website, Facebook and Twitter once they are available. An email will be sent to all members who have provided their address as well.

Watch for details regarding our plans for 2020 in the December issue of *News and Views*. Thank you for your continued interest and support of the SCHA. We welcome input from authors from across the county, and as you can see in this issue, there are many points of interest to be shared!

Simcoe County Historical Association Executive

Ted Duncan, President	tedcansher@sympatico.ca	705-326-9809
Mark Fisher, Vice President	mwfisher2@hotmail.com	705-728-3825
Donna Wice, Secretary	mdwice@sympatico.ca	705-436-2578

For membership information, contact

John Merritt	membership@simcoecountyhistory.ca	705-896-5562
--------------	--	--------------



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

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



President's Report by Ted Duncan

I'm looking forward to a new season working to preserve of our County's history. I had a chance to visit and speak at the Bradford West Gwillimbury celebration for the 200th Anniversary of the Scotch Settlement in that town in June. The BWGLHA had a great day at the Auld Kirk bringing our history alive to the many visitors. The Association can be very proud of the work they are doing. The SCHA Board is proud to present the Heritage Business Award to Beattie's Potato Farm/Distillery on October 5th. The Beattie Family has been part of the development and growth of Simcoe County for decades. Our

County has deep agricultural roots, and we wish to honour that fact. Please come and join us on the 5th to celebrate our history. We have our Speaker Series again this year, and we hope that you join us to hear stories of our history. Also this year, we continue to review policies, processes and our constitution to ensure that we do things well. As your President, I hope to visit as many of our member Societies as I can. If I haven't been to see you, please call me. I will be at the next SUMAC meeting on the 19th of September to speak to that Museum group about the SCHA. Also I hope to meet with Tiny's

Heritage committee in the near future about SCHA's Barn Photo survey. Yes, we are still looking for people to take pictures of barns around the County. This summer I collected over 20 boxes of files and books from the Josephine Boos collection. Josephine was a long time member of SCHA and past editor of *News and Views*. I am happy that these files were preserved. Please continue to be a member as it is our main source of income, and donate when you can to help us preserve our history. We need active members on our Board too.

Essa Township Historical Society 40th Anniversary by Richard Blanchard

The Essa Township Historical Society has just celebrated its 40th anniversary. The society held a luncheon in Thornton which saw both current and past members, friends and others gather to make the occasion

Founded in May, 1979, the society's first meeting saw 37 members gather in Egbert to form the new group. "We were lucky that so many of our original members had deep roots in the township who brought an excellent knowledge of the township's history" says current society secretary Olive Lee.

In the past four decades, the society has erected 14 plaques throughout the township which celebrate its hamlets, villages and people of this municipality.

A history of the township between 1950 and 2000 was published to mark the township's 150th birthday in 2000. Histories of the township's communities, complete with local family histories, have also been published during these years. In total, the society has published 11 books during the past four decades.

In more recent years, the society

has also printed seven annual calendars which have featured the township's schools, churches and centennial farms.

The society holds regular monthly meetings on Saturday afternoons during the fall, winter and spring months which see a variety of speakers on historical matters.

Information on the meetings is publicized on the township web site and in the coming events section of several local newspapers.

Visitors are always welcome!

Simcoe County Archives' hours of operation change

In September, 2019, the Simcoe County Archives' (SCA) public hours of operation will be changing. The new hours are **Tuesday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. (statutory holidays excepted)**

The Simcoe County Archives collects, preserves, and makes available the documentary history of the

County of Simcoe, including: the permanent records of the County of Simcoe, its lower-tier municipalities, and the City of Barrie; historical records; and records from private organizations, businesses, and individuals.

The SCA is open to the public for research into the County's history.

This change to SCA's hours of operation is not permanent. The Archives will reopen on Mondays when the backlog has been reduced.

Archives' staff will still be available by email and telephone Monday to Friday, 8:30-4:30 at archives@simcoe.ca or 705-726-9331.

100 years of Diversification: From Potatoes to Potato chips to Hand-crafted Potato Vodka

by Liz & Ken Beattie

Kenny's great-grandfather Roland Beattie came to Canada from Scotland in the late 1800s. He settled in Alliston with his family and purchased what is now known as The Beattie Pinery property, with an eye towards the lumber business as well as livery stable and horses. Having the lumber supply, he built his own lumber mill which flourished in the 1920s. With business being so good he was able to purchase more land adjacent to the Pinery to carry out his farming desire and so the growing of potatoes began.

At Roland's passing, the farming business was passed on to his only son, Kenny's grandfather, Mackenzie, who was already farming potatoes, carrots and other vegetables. In 1952 Kenny's father, Ronald, purchased his own farm and by the 1970s focused on potatoes alone for processing. By 1972 Ron already had potato storage for 12 million pounds and went on to double that with the building of a new facility in 1974 to accommodate Frito Lay for the largest processing contract at that time in Canada.

Kenny worked alongside his father for as long as he can remember,

leaving school at 17, and was able to purchase his first farm in 1978. John, his brother, is also a big part of the potato business with his own farms nearby. Kenny's youngest son, Barry, is the 5th generation farmer for the Beatties. He is proving to be a real technical wizard for improving how the family farms, and continue to plant, nurture and harvest the finest potatoes around. Over 2000 acres of potatoes are cultivated by the Beattie family.



Kenny has always been a forward thinker. After having lunch with a couple of friends three years ago, he decided to take his wife Liz to

PEI and check out a small craft distillery producing potato vodka. Within the week, they were in PEI, learning all they could about the distilling business. They both agreed, "this is something we can do"! That's where it all started. Liz plays a key role as the Chief Operating Officer and ambassador.

Kenny and Liz have always been active in the community by volunteering their time. Kenny was a volunteer fire fighter until 2015 when he retired after 40 years of service. He is also a volunteer with the Alliston Union Cemetery Board for over 20 years now, 10 of which have been as President. Kenny is an honorary member of the Alliston Fire Fighter's Association which holds fundraising events that support the community and the people who live in it.

When the Beatties decided to start the distillery, they wanted to give something back to the good people of Alliston. As such, they decided as a family to donate 50c of every bottle to local charities/causes.....Matthew's House / CONTACT Community Services / Alliston Fire Fighter's Association / Good Shepherd Food Bank / Donate for Nate.

2019 Simcoe County Heritage Business Award Winner

Simcoe County Historical Association is pleased to announce the selection of Beattie's Potato Farm and Distillery of Alliston as the 2019 Heritage Business Award winner. Congratulations to the Beattie's Farm and Family: a 5 generation family business in Simcoe County contributing to the community and the economic development for 100 years.

An award ceremony will take place on Saturday October 5, 2019 from 2-

4 p.m. at the Beattie Distillery located at 6673 Line 13, Alliston, with formal congratulations and the personal Beattie story beginning at 2:15. Tours, light refreshments and vodka sampling will follow.

This invitation is extended to all Simcoe County Historical members and their friends. Come and join us as we celebrate with the Beattie family and our south western corner of Simcoe County neighbours.

From Bradford:

Take 5th Side Rd and turn left on 11th Line
Turn right onto 10th Side Rd
Turn left at the 1st cross street onto 12th Line
Turn right onto Tottenham Rd/County Rd 10
Turn right onto Line 13
Destination on the right - 6673 Line 13

From Barrie:

400 S to exit 75 Highway 89 toward Alliston
Turn right onto 89 W
Turn left onto 10th Side Rd
Turn right onto Line 13
Destination on the left - 6673 Line 13

The Historical Importance of Lake Simcoe

by W. Allan Fisher, submitted by Mark Fisher

A name that conceals a remarkable heritage in respect to communication route joining what is now Lake Ontario with Georgian Bay is that of Lake Simcoe.

Long before that sixth Great Lake was named by Bayfield, the aborigines from the Huron waters ventured as far south as Lake Ontario by way of Lake Simcoe. But then it had another name. John Graves Simcoe, the first governor of Upper Canada, gave the name of his father to the lake in 1793. By 1806 the District of Simcoe took its name from the lake according to a map authorized in that year.

When the French first made contact with the lake in 1615 it was known as Ouentarion and so it appears in the earliest of French maps. The natives used the lake as a rallying place and centre-place for the several routes connecting Lake Ontario with Lake Huron. Such routes saved the long voyage by way of Lake Erie to the Upper Lakes. Parkman describes in vivid language the war-party of five hundred Ottawas that travelled through the lake on their way to join Denonville at Niagara in 1687 to scorch out the Senecas. It was have been an awesome sight.

Because of the lake's central position its name identified all of these routes including the Trent waterway. The name Ouentarion, after the dispersal of the Huron, evolved to become Toronto or Toronto. Baron Lahontan, the French commandant at Michilimackinac, 1687-88, described on his map the outer part of Matchedash Bay as Baye de Toronto. On a map of 1715 the present Lake Simcoe appears as Lake of Toronto. The fur-traders' route of the next 40 years from the Humber or Rouge to Matchedash or the Nottawasaga River was known as "le passage de Toronto".

After the conquest of New France and the burning of French buildings

known as Fort Roulle near the mouth of the Humber, the passage de Toronto became the Toronto Carrying Place. The lake that the French had described as the "lac aux Claies" or the Lake of the fish-weirs at the Narrows lost its name to the entrance of the route leading from Lake Ontario to Lake Huron. It is remarkable that the present name of the metropolis and capital of Ontario should have come into existence as a former name of the lake we know as Simcoe.

Bears Resemblance

It is possible and more remarkable that Ouentarion, the Huron name for Lake Simcoe, bears such a resemblance to Ontario that the name of the lower great lake and correspondingly the province itself, derives from the name of this body of water known as Lake Simcoe, central to a strategic water-route between the lower and the upper Great Lakes.

The first governor of the province was less interested in heritage than we are, and more interested in establishing a little England in the wilderness where he hoped to build a "fortress Upper Canada". He began setting aside grants of land for an aristocratic class of loyal gentry and for an established church of England. On his instructive voyage by canoe from Holland's Landing to the mouth of Penetanguishene Bay he erased the former French name of Lac Aux Claies in deference to his father whose association with the Royal Navy, in James Cook, and the H.M.S. Penelope was significant enough.

But the name of the Duke of Gloucester was not significant enough to challenge the aboriginal name of Matchedash, a definitive name with Michilimackinac.

For a considerable time after he left Canada, Simcoe was honoured by Upper Canadians in the naming of a town, a county, and several streets.

The latest gesture, as contemporary Canadians seek to make heritage a commercial commodity, is in the naming of the Toronto hotel, Lord Simcoe. In one sense it is more flattering than factual for Simcoe was never knighted for his loyalty and services to England. Military circles recognized his talents and promoted him to lieutenant-general, and so he died on his way to take over command in India in 1808.

Simcoe left a name that masks a storehouse of written and unwritten heritage. His correspondence was collected into five volumes by Colonel A. E. Cruikshank in the early part of this (the 20th) century. In the correspondence one finds a description of the voyage taken by Simcoe to "Lac aux Claies" in September-October, 1793. On it, he dreamed of completing a military communication to take the place of the Detroit route to the Upper Lakes.

Detroit, a British border post, by the terms of the peace treaty ending the War of Independence, had to be given to the Americans. For the security of western lands that later became Canada, Simcoe had to find another route to that of the tortuous Ottawa-French river fur trading communication.

The former names for Lake Simcoe – the French "lac aux claies" for example, invoke memories of the French fact in Simcoe county. The fish weirs at the Narrows at Orillia remind us of a native culture and enterprise that helped sustain a trading empire on the waters that still bear the name Huron.

When one compares Ouentarion with Ontario, and Toronto with Toronto, names that can be found on maps of the seventeenth century identifying the present Lake Simcoe, one realizes the historic importance of this body of water.

Celebrations mark 200th anniversary of black settlement in Oro

by John Merritt

On Sunday, August 4, there was a celebration at the Oro African Church to mark the 200th anniversary of the establishment of the historic black settlement in Oro Township.

In April 1819, the government of Upper Canada initiated the settlement of black pioneers in the area by granting free land to black citizens in the second concession of Oro, along a concession line that was named Wilberforce Street in honour of a famous British abolitionist but in reality was never more than occasional stretches of road broken by dense patches of forest.

The government started the black settlement at the same time that it initiated settlement along the newly-created and strategic Penetanguishene Road which linked the naval establishment at Penetanguishene with the capital at York via Lake Simcoe. All of the settlers granted land along the Penetanguishene Road were white, mostly from the British Isles. At the time that settlement began, the land awarded to the black pioneers was isolated from the rest of the province and from their closest neighbours on the Penetanguishene Road, separated by miles of forest and connected only by the occasional old First Nations trail.

Between about 1825 and 1831, black settlement shifted east into the interior of Oro Township, in an area roughly centered around the village of Edgar. Black settlement in the area appears to have ceased by 1831, when large-scale immigration to the area from the British Isles began.

Located at the intersection of the third line of Oro and the Old Barrie Road, not far from the village of Edgar, the Oro African Episcopal Methodist Church was built between 1846 and 1849, a small, single-room log structure that served as the center of the local black community for many years.

Between 1830 and 1870, the black

population of Oro remained at its peak around 100 people, then declined steadily as black families moved elsewhere, until by the 1910s only a handful of individuals remained. The last black resident of the township left in 1947.

By that time, the Oro African Church had been abandoned for many years, until a group of local residents, most of them white, banded together to restore and preserve the building, with the assistance of the township and county governments. This tradition continued into the 21st century, when a second major restoration was undertaken by the Township of Oro-Medonte with financial support from the Trillium Foundation and a high profile crowd-funding campaign.

The creation of the black settlement in Oro was significant because it predated Emancipation in the British Empire by almost 20 years. It was also the only time that a black community in the province was created through government policy. The people who settled in Oro represented many of the different groups that made up the black population of early 19th-century Upper Canada: free British citizens, immigrants from the northern US, and escaped slaves from the southern states. Many

of the settlers of Oro had already been living and farming in the province for many years. Many also had served during the War of 1812. During later crises, including the Rebellion of 1837 and even WWI, many black settlers and their descendants volunteered for military service.

The celebration began with a special service at the historic St. Thomas' Church in Shanty Bay, followed by an open house at the church in the afternoon. The date of the celebration marks Emancipation Day, the anniversary of the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire in 1834. Ever since, that date has been an important event in the cultural life of black communities across the Commonwealth, including in Oro, where it was marked each year by a community picnic.

The church will remain open to the public every Saturday afternoon for the rest of the summer, with interpreters from the Simcoe County Museum on site to assist visitors. During off hours, visitors are still welcome to tour the grounds with the help of an app that explains the history of the church and the historic black community that created it.



Community asset or land-fill fodder? by Deb Crawford

As I travel around Simcoe County, it is hard to ignore the abandoned farmhouses: the homes that held the dreams and future of our early settlers. The pioneers, the veterans, the immigrants who sought a better life all made homes here in Simcoe County. The times have changed; farms no longer just represent survival but to survive the farm must be profitable: to be profitable, size, diversity, the health of the owner and the capacity of the family must all play a part. As alternatives, the land could be leased and farmed by a neighbouring farmer or an ever-growing number of management corporations or perhaps sold outright and then leased to generate profit. There are many reasons that have led those proud independent and hardworking farmers to leave their homes and farms, but as can be seen by the empty houses, they have packed up their memories and belongings and moved on. Good for them, the developers and the management firms, but not so for the municipalities or heritage conservation.

The solid homes built in the late 1800s or early 1900s are being left abandoned with hydro and water services removed. These properties are perfect examples of “demolition

by neglect”. At some time when it suits the developer/management corporation, they will apply to the municipality for a demolition permit citing the poor condition of the property. The application is justified given the plans for a new subdivision that will generate \$X in development fees and future property tax revenue as well as satisfy the province’s official plan to meet density targets. And of course, if the property is not designated and not on the municipal registry, the demolition permit will be approved. Sad but true.



On the other hand, we talk about social responsibility, caring for our future generations, a lack of affordable housing and land fill sites that destroy our water supply and mar our countryside. These properties could be subdivided and sold separately, or rented to offer alternatives to those unable to or working toward purchasing a home, or re-used as a showcase home in the new subdivision or a community hub in the new subdivisions. The options are unlimited if profit is not your sole consideration.

Heritage conservation is as much about preserving our past as it is understanding our present and preparing for the future. Why are we not demanding that viable properties are maintained and available as subsidized housing stock? Why do we allow developers and property management companies to remove essential services of existing buildings without some form of collaboration from the municipality or a heritage assessment? Why do we allow developers and management companies to demolish properties for “convenience”? Perhaps you should ask your local counsellor, mayor, municipality or heritage committee.

Drury family celebrates 200 years in Oro-Medonte by John Merritt

This year marks the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the Drury family in Canada. Over several generations, the family has made its mark in farming, business, and politics and has remained on the same Oro-Medonte farmsteads that they originally settled in 1819.

Two hundred years ago, Joseph Drury decided to leave his small farm in Warwickshire, England to seek better opportunities for his family in Upper Canada. Leaving his wife and younger children in England, Joseph emigrated to Canada with his sons Thomas (14) and Richard (16), and each settled on 200-acre lots along the Penetanguishene Road which had just been opened for settlement.

For generations afterward, members of the Drury family excelled in this part of Canada as farmers and as politicians. Richard Drury served as the first ever reeve of Oro Township

as well as a justice of the peace, holding court for minor offences in the front room of his house. His brother Thomas served as a township councilor and later as reeve and, for many years, as county sheriff.

Richard’s son Charles, born in 1844, served as reeve of Oro Township for 13 years and for 10 as a Member of Parliament for the Liberals. In 1888, he was appointed Ontario’s first Minister of Agriculture by Premier Oliver Mowat.

One of the best-known descendants of the Drury family was Charles’ son Ernest Charles (E. C.) Drury, a long-time leader of the provincial agrarian movement and the only Premier of Ontario ever elected from the United Farmers of Ontario party. During his years in office, Premier Drury instituted many notable reforms, including a provincial reforestation program (that helped created the Simcoe

County Forests) and the provincial highway system. After his retirement, E. C. Drury supported local efforts to preserve the Oro African Church site in Oro-Medonte. Thanks to his efforts, the church is now a National Historic Site that survives to this day.

A later descendant, Bob Drury, served on Oro Township Council from 1982 to 1985 and as reeve from 1985 to 1994. He was also the first mayor of the Township of Oro-Medonte after amalgamation, at the same time that he served as county warden.

The Drury family marked this important anniversary at their ancestors’ original farms, which are still owned by members of the family after seven generations. Drury family were invited to a reunion on August 3. The next day a public celebration was held, featuring government representatives and guest speakers.

Letitia Magee 1788-1849: A Woman Before Her Time? by Jan Blommaert

Letitia Magee came to Upper Canada from County Cavan, Ireland with her father Charles, her step mother Bessie and several siblings. About 1829 they came to West Gwillimbury. This Magee family were among the early Irish immigrants who arrived with enough money to become comfortably settled.

In the spring of 1830, Letitia, single and about 30 years of age, purchased 150 acres of lot 15 concession 7 West Gwillimbury which is now most of Bradford west from Barrie Street to Toronto St. and north from Holland Street to Line 8. She paid 100 pounds to Robert Ross of Whitchurch Twp., who had just received the patent for this land from the Crown. There were a few settlers starting to arrive at present day Bradford about 1830, one being Malloy's tavern located where the road going to the Scotch Settlement and the road going north crossed (east of Barrie St. around Scanlon Ave.)

Letitia had a cabin built near John and Moore Streets. It is unclear if her parents lived with her or not. She remained unmarried. The first

parcel of land registered from her 150 acres was her gift to the Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1836 of a half acre. Bradford United Church is still located at this site on Barrie St.

She had a plan of subdivision made and registered. Between 1837 and her death in 1849, she sold about 25 lots along the north side of Holland St., John St. (west of Barrie St.), west side of Barrie St., and Moore St. She sold them for about fifty pounds per acre, mostly in one half and one quarter acre lots; the price remained the same in 1849 as it had been in 1837.

In May 1848 her step mother died, in May 1849 her father died, and in August 1849 Letitia died at the age of 61 years. Their causes of death remain unknown. All three are buried at The Auld Kirk Cemetery on Line 6, West Gwillimbury.

She wrote a very long and explicit will. She appears to have picked and chosen her heirs, often women. The executors of her will were John Armstrong of West Gwillimbury, who was married to her step

sister Eliza, James Stoddars (a.k.a. Stoddart), and neighbour James Watson Barry. Each of her executors was left one lot on John St.

Her will names several of her sisters and brothers living in many places: Eliza and John Armstrong of West Gwillimbury, John Magee of Co. Cavan Ireland, James and Robert Magee of Essa, Letitia Brennan of Johnstown District (eastern Ont.), and Mary Ann Bowes, widow of Robert, late of Trafalgar, Gore District (now Halton Co.).

To date no extensive history about this unusual woman has been found. It would seem she had an education to conduct business as she did. In spite of her wealth, she seems to have lived a relatively modest life style in her home on John St. in Bradford.

Many questions remain. Was her father the driving force behind her? Did she remain single to retain the rights to her properties? Or was she a totally liberated, strong independent woman ahead of her time?

Cemetery Guardians restore Wilson's Hill by Janine Harris Wheatley and Tracey Melidy

The Cemetery Guardians Committee is a joint project of the Tecumseth and West Gwillimbury Historical Society and the Bradford West Gwillimbury Local History Association. It was started after some of our members assisted in the 2016 restoration of Newton Robinson Cemetery. They asked the TWGHS Board to select a new project. Wilson's Hill Pioneer Cemetery and Middleton Cemetery (Christ Church) in Bradford West Gwillimbury were identified as heritage locations that were in need of care and restoration. The group

was named Cemetery Guardians to encourage other history organizations to keep a watchful eye on the pioneer cemeteries in their areas.

Because both Wilson's Hill and Middleton are classed as "inactive cemeteries", as defined by the Ontario Cemetery Act, the municipality bears responsibility for their care and upkeep. The Board's first step was to apply to the Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury for permission to restore the landscaping and to reveal and raise or lower plot and grave markers which had been covered by years of thatch or sunk un-

der the weight of heavy grass cutting machines. It was made clear in our proposal that this was not an archaeology project, which would entail meeting the requirements of the Heritage Act. The Ontario Funeral, Burial and Cremation Services Act, 2002, is another piece of legislation that might be a useful reference. People can also contact the Bereavement Authority of Ontario to find out if the cemetery is registered, obtain its site number, and find who holds responsibility.

Once BWG gave permission the group began to plan their work at

Cemetery Guardians restore Wilson's Hill continued

Wilson's Hill, having determined it was the site most at risk of deteriorating past saving. The President emailed the particulars to the members on behalf of the Chair, Vaughan Harris. Generally Vaughan, Tracey Melidy, and Louis Theriault turn up, joined by next door neighbour Nick Pezante with other helpers dropping in from time to time.



What is it about Wilson's Hill that has kept this team working diligently for three years and counting? In the Visitors Book, people have commented that Wilson's Hill is the prettiest cemetery they have ever seen and praise its restoration. Where the graves rest is reached by a sharp climb through old woods to a plateau covered by a canopy of locusts and other native trees that dapple the sunshine and sweeten the air. Woodland wildflowers, day lilies, iris, and sedum have been allowed to flourish. Toppled trees and branches have been removed and paths cleared. Benches are scattered throughout so visitors can rest after their ascent or just sit in contemplation as feelings of peace and serenity surround them. It is a

sacred place filled with the stories of the past.

The Cemetery, originally part of the Wilson farm, was signed over to the Trustees of the First Presbyterian Congregation of Essa in 1858 for the sum of five shillings (25 cents) by member James Wilson. Obituaries researched from area newspapers describe the long funeral cortèges travelling south from Cookstown along Highway 27. The oldest known grave marker is for Elen Sutherland, dated 1839; the last burial was William Dinwoody in 1958. Along with Duff, Gilroy, Chapman, and Dearing, to name a few, local history buffs will recognize the names of many of the first settlers who travelled from Great Britain to take up land grants in the 1820s and 30s. The Visitors Book is filled with comments from their descendants. There is a memorial to wife Meargareth (sixc) McBride Kirk who was one of 98 people lost in 1882 when the steamship Asia sank on Georgian Bay. Two stones bear memorial Inscriptions for sons who died in France in World War One, Private Gordon Nevils and Thomas Saunders. The five Nevils children died in a seven week period and are buried side by side, one of the many poignant stories of early settlement inscribed on the stones.

In the years following the last burial it seemed the cemetery was almost forgotten. Then Neil McBride began driving over from Barrie to work in the grounds. Other volunteers, such as Jack Dinwoody, who did the grass-cutting, joined in to tame the overgrowth, restore stones, erect signs and benches, plant native trees, and generally bring order back to the landscape. After Neil McBride's death in 1984 maintenance was again neglected and

nature took over. The Essa Historical Society installed a sign in memory of Neil McBride and maintained a flower bed at the corner of Highway 27 and the 12th Line, but it wasn't until the summer of 2017 that the daunting task of fully restoring the Cemetery began again.



The Cemetery Guardians agreed to meet one morning a week. Their first, and ongoing, task has been to cut back the shrubs and brush, prune the trees, gather the deadwood, and remove the choking vines and weeds that obscured the monuments. Dead trees have been cut down and a tree nursery created to house rescued seedlings that can be transplanted to replace dying trees and maintain the canopy. Each visit a collection of tools gets wheeled up the hill in a bucket attached to a dolly: hacksaw, pruners, rake, trowels, secateurs, and weed eater, along with work-gloves, drinking water, and mosquito deterrent. Also included are probes to gently locate buried stones. These can be made by lightly pointing one end of a steel rod then welding a smooth handle on the other end. Ideally at least one probe will be long enough for people to use without bending over, helpful when quartering plots for markers or elusive cornerposts. Shorter, thinner probes will better slide into rock-hard soil. A camera and sketchbook are essential for recording the en-

Cemetery Guardians restore Wilson's Hill continued

tire process and a hundred foot measuring tape to map the site and mark out the rows and plots.

Initially the outlines of the plots were undefined. A dense thatch of grass and moss covered the plots and fallen stones. This was very carefully removed by hand to avoid further damaging the underlying inscriptions. It was discovered that many of the family plots had once been enclosed by low iron railings (3/4 square) which were attached to stone cornerposts and decorated by chain garlands weighted by cast iron bells and thistle flowers. The rails were located in a heap on one of the plots. These were straightened as necessary and replaced. Plots with cornerposts now have the enclosures restored to recreate the historic vision. Much of this ground work continues as long as the weather stays mild and the ground and

hands unfrozen.

All work does not stop, however, when the snow falls. During the first winter Neil McBride's wooden interpretative signs were restored and protected from further damage from the elements, as was the wooden box that holds the Visitors Logbook. The second winter existing benches were restored and new ones built by Vaughan with funding for the cedar provided by BWGLHA.

The task occupying our CG Researcher, Tracey Melidy, winter, summer, spring, and fall has been digging into the rich past of Wilson's Hill and its inhabitants through old newspapers, family records, history books, Neil McBride's files, and other research done by members of the various local history groups. Inscriptions have recently been transcribed and photographed by On-

tario Ancestors (formerly the Ontario Genealogical Society), Simcoe County Branch. Puzzles are gradually being solved and more stories revealed. What Tracey most dreams of is to discover old family photos that show the cemetery as it looked in years past. Were there always trees or were they planted in Neil McBride's time or did they plant themselves?

Andrew Hunter's *History of Simcoe County* (c1909) and obituaries from local newspapers at the County Archives record more burials than those listed in TWGHS *Cemetery Inscriptions Tecumseth and West Gwillimbury Townships* (c1982). Where are these graves? Are there more stones to find? And the biggest and most expensive question, what more might Ground Penetrating Radar reveal? Stay tuned. *With thanks to Janine Harris Wheatley for photos*

Fall Events at the Simcoe County Museum

Simcoe County Quilt, Rug and Craft Fair

What do quilting, embroidery, rug hooking, spinning, hand weaving, lace-making and teddy bear making all have in common? They are just some of the beautiful heritage-style crafts that you will see being created, displayed, and sold at the Museum September 20-22.

The Fair is perfect for everyone from an amateur to an expert, and there is always something new for people to see and learn, and chances are, you won't go home empty-handed. Many items are available to purchase from one-of-a-kind products to supplies that will help you along your way to making your own masterpiece.

The Fair runs from 9:30-5 Friday and Saturday and 9:30-4 on Sunday. Event Rates apply: Museum Members and

Preschoolers are free; Adults \$8; Youth and Seniors \$6; and Children are \$5 and includes access to most of the Museum's permanent indoor displays and outdoor heritage and display buildings.

Forestry Interpretive Centre Opening Tuesday, September 24

Official Opening at 1 p.m.
Open House from 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Forests are the heart of our lives. They supply the fresh air we breathe, they filter our water, they provide habitat for wildlife, and they provide people with the chance to get outside and enjoy nature. Our forests are the places where we camp and hike, where we go to watch and listen for animals, and to connect back with nature. Forests have a strong link to our health. They speed up recovery, reduce our stress, and improve our learning. By connecting with

the forest, we can start to understand how important the forest is to our everyday lives.

The Forestry Interpretive Building will enhance public awareness and understanding about our local forest history including the key role that the County Forestry Department has played in restoring our environmental health.

Last Blast

Saturday, October 19 10-4

Evenings of Halloween

Monday, October 28, Tuesday, October 29 and Wednesday, October 30 6-8:30 p.m.

*High School Students: get your volunteer hours with us! Sign up now to get on the list – email museum@simcoe.ca with Halloween Volunteer in the subject line.

You are invited to submit photos and articles regarding your historical happenings in Simcoe County. Please email to Jill Hynes, Editor at news@simcoecountyhistory.ca

Coming Events of Member Societies

Alliston Historical Society
[Contact](#) Jackie Baillie 705-435-5626
Meet at Museum on the Boyne 2 p.m. 2nd Wednesday Feb-June, Oct, Nov

[Barrie Historical Archive](#)
Contact [Deb Exel](#)
Sept. 16-21 Barrie Historical Week in the City of Barrie
Sept. 21 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.
[Historical Downtown Walking Tour](#)
Oct. 12 Haunted Heritage Walk: Downtown Barrie, Free event
Contact [us](#) for more information

Bradford/West Gwillimbury Historical Association
Contact [Jan Blommaert](#), 705-456-1870
Meet at BWG Library 2 p.m. 4th Saturday Jan-May, Sept-Nov

[Coldwater Canadian Heritage Museum](#)

[Collingwood District Historical Society](#)
Contact Joan Miller 705-445-1119
Meet at Leisure Time Club 7 p.m.
Oct. 7 *Jason Booth* The Collingwood Grain Elevators

[Collingwood Museum](#)
Contact Susan Warner 705-445-4811

Essa Historical Society
Contact [Olive Lee](#) 705-458-9971
Meet at Thornton Library 1:30 p.m. 4th Saturday Jan-June, Sept-Nov

[Friends of Fort Willow](#)
Sept. 28 Festival at the Fort: Life at the Fort in 1812

[Friends of the OPP Museum](#)
Contact Matt Eade 705-330-4178

Heritage Barrie
Sept. 21 [Doors Open Ontario – Simcoe County](#)

[Huron Museum/Huron Ouendat Village](#)
Contact : 705-526-2844

[Innisfil Historical Society](#)
Contact Donna Wice
Meet at Knock Comm Centre 2 p.m.
Sept. 21 *Bill Bentley and Kwesi Millington* RCMP

[Museum on the Boyne](#)
Contact Katie Huddleston 705-435-4030 x. 1802

[Orillia Museum of Art and History](#)
Contact 705-326-2159
Oct. 16 *Orillia Secondary School* From Ortona to Juno: A Journey of Remembrance
Nov. 20 *Fred Kallin* Raoul Wallenberg: Legendary Hero
Orillia Museum of Art and History
orilliamuseum.org 705-326-2159

to Sept. 29 Project Voyager: An Exploration of Place and Time
to Nov. 3 When The Green Dark Forest Was Too Silent To Be Real

Sept. 21-Jan. 11 Ingrid Mayrhofer: After Krieghoff
Sept. 28-Oct. 13 Pest Control: Works by John Ross and Amy Swartz

Oct. 12-Jan. 26 *Industrial Legacy:*
A History of Dorr-Oliver-Long Limited
Nov. 8-Jan. 22 The Carmichael Canadian Landscape Exhibition

[Penetanguishene Centennial Museum and Archives](#)
Contact Nicole Jackson 705-549-2150

[Ramara Historical Society](#)
Contact [Cathy Westcott](#)
Meet at Udney Community Centre 7 p.m. 3rd Thurs Jan-June, Sept, Dec
Sept. 19 *Ken Alsop* History of Barn Building and Member Show & Tell of Vintage Barn Building Tools
Oct. 17 *Jacob of Bass Lake Farms* Heritage Farms – Harvest Seeds
Nov. 21 Annual General Meeting and Election of RHS Directors
Dec. 12 Christmas Potluck / Social at 6:00 p.m. at Udney Community Centre

[Simcoe County Branch, Genealogical Society](#)
Contact Nancy Leveque
Meet at Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints 2 p.m.
Oct. 5 *Spencer Linington* Paleography and Other Funny Little Words
Nov. 2 *Kathleen Bacher* German Research

[Simcoe County Museum](#)
Contact Kelly Swift-Jones 705-728-3721
See page 9

[Stayner Heritage Society](#)
Contact Tom Scholte 705-517-5171

Tecumseth & West Gwillimbury Historical Society
Contact [Janine Harris-Wheatley](#) 905-936-6549
Meet at TecWeGwill Hall 7:30 3rd Monday Jan-May, Sept-Nov