

NEWS views

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Simcoe County Historical Association

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President's Report

The Covid Pandemic has changed how we do things. It can stop us in our tracks or we can look at it as an opportunity. The Simcoe County Historical Association believes that we can get people to meetings at the County level despite distance and often poor weather. Now we can join together at Zoom meetings through the winter as we have never done. We believe this is the way of the future even after the Pandemic is over.

The SCHA Board has been working to reach out to our group members over the last 4 months. We contacted member Societies and Associations to see if they were interested in meeting by Zoom to talk about common problems and the possibilities of working together on County wide projects. If your group hasn't had an invitation,

please contact me about joining. Individual members are welcome too.

We met in November and again in January and February. About 10 groups responded but the number varies at each meeting. Still members seem to be interested in continuing these meetings into the future. We are not meeting again until April as the SCHA has its AGM on March 23rd. We are hoping that those society members and individual members as well will join us for our Annual Meeting. More information will be sent to our membership along with a Zoom invitation shortly. Even if you are a non-member and want to join us, please contact me for an invitation.

We are calling our group Zooms "Connections Meetings". Two initiatives have been

identified through our discussions. People are interested in a photo barn survey in each municipality which will result in a complete photographic list of barns in Simcoe County. Also people are interested in becoming involved in the preservation and care of pioneer cemeteries within the County. These projects have been started in some parts of the County already.

Our Connections Meetings have also discussed a "County History Conference" to share interest in history. We have discussed how the SCHA can support member organizations through our website, newsletter, zoom meetings and social media.

We can do so much about preserving and recording, if we work together.

Ted Duncan, SCHA President

Simcoe County Historical Association Executive



Ted Duncan, President
Mark Fisher, Vice President
Donna Wice, Secretary
John Merritt

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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.



Renew your SCHA Membership Today!

It's time to pay for 2021!

You can renew your membership by March 31 using one of the following ways:

Pay by PayPal – payments may be sent to info@simcoecountyhistory.ca

Pay by Credit Card online - <https://www.simcoecountyhistory.ca/memberships/>

Pay by Credit Card over the phone – please email us at info@simcoecountyhistory.ca

Pay by Cheque: download our form and return by mail -

<https://www.simcoecountyhistory.ca/memberships/>

If you're not sure if you have already paid for 2021, please check with the Membership Chair John Merritt at membership@simcoecountyhistory.ca

Annual General Meeting

Tuesday March 23 at 7pm
Via Zoom (coordinates provided via email)

The Annual General Meeting of the Simcoe County Historical Association, followed by our speaker:

Cathy Walton

Vanishing Barns: Remembering the Gentle Giants Through Photographs, Stories, Diaries and Genealogy

The barns become alive with the stories told by their owners. Photos of each unique barn records an important link to the preservation of our Simcoe County history.

ODE TO YOUTH

The winner of the Andrew Hunter Award in 2014 received a \$500 cheque and a copy of "A History of Simcoe County" by Andrew Hunter. This young man went on to complete his history degree.

In 2017, with SCHA in dire straits-only 3 executive members, very few ideas and diminishing hopes for the future, a plea was sent out in the winter newsletter. John Merritt was one of 2 respondees to our plea for help. John's phone call and his youth were so welcome. His writing skills have flourished and his perspective on many topics is insightful. Clearly he can turn any topic into a delightful read (hence the Wice story).

Now a married man, and father of 2 girls, John willingly works along side the oldies who make up the rest of your executive. He is a delight!



“The burden and the sacrifice”: Canada’s first tax season, March 1918

by John Merritt

If you’re anything like me, you may find yourself approaching each tax season with the same level of enthusiasm with which you tackled your grade-school math homework, with an unhealthy degree of foreboding mixed in. But maybe we would all do well to remember that each year, when we are filling out our income tax forms, we are all participating in a historical event tracing its origins back to the First World War.

For more than 50 years after Confederation, there was no such thing as an income tax here in Canada. The bulk of federal revenues came from customs and excise duties, not taxes. Canada’s lax tax situation was in stark contrast to other western nations like Great Britain and the United States, whose governments all taxed income. In fact, the absence of any significant personal tax system in Canada was in direct response to that fact — for most of our early history as a nation, successive federal governments may have sought to lure British and American immigrants here in part by offering them freedom from oppressive personal taxes.

In September 1917, however, in the third year of the First World War, the federal government introduced a temporary tax on personal income as a way to help fund the war, which still had no clear end in sight and had already racked up a price tag of almost \$10 billion in today’s money.

The new tax was initially introduced as a temporary wartime measure, but in recognition of the uncertainty of conditions in the postwar years, whenever they would come, Sir Thomas White, the Minister of Finance responsible for proposing the tax, placed no time limit on the measure. Instead, he merely suggested the government review the practice a year or two after the war had ended to determine whether or not it was still needed. “I am confident,” Minister White told the House of Commons, “that the people of Canada, whose patriotism . . . has been so often and so nobly proven, will, in light of present conditions . . . cheerfully accept the burden and the sacrifice of this additional taxation.”

The new income tax exempted most Canadians earning \$3,000 a year or less (about \$50,000 or less in today’s money). For Canadians earning double that amount or more, tax rates ranged from 2% to as much as 25%. These relatively high tax thresholds exempted the vast majority of Canadians, more than 90% of them, from even having to file a tax return.

In the weeks leading up to Canada’s first income tax-filing deadline of March 31, 1918, the *Barrie Examiner* took a positive attitude towards the new measure, portraying the income tax as a patriotic duty and expressing certainty that all Canadians would do their part in filing the necessary forms and paying

what they were obliged to — if anything. In an editorial on March 21, 1918, the *Examiner* lauded the new tax as a unique opportunity for Canadians to become more aware of their finances and get better at saving money, “which means getting on with the war, as well as happiness all around.” In an article on March 28, the *Examiner* “confidently expected that the people of Canada, jealous of their right to play a major role in this conflict [World War I], will respond to this latest call in a spirit of quiet patriotism.”

So how did a temporary wartime tax become a permanent fixture of life in 21st-century Canada? When the First World War finally ended in November 1918, the government still needed to pay for war-related expenses like veterans’ pensions and interest on the war debts it had accrued. In the interwar years, not only did income taxes continue, but a new tax on sales was also introduced. During the government of William Lyon Mackenzie King, from 1935 to 1948, most of the system of customs and excise duties that had previously sustained federal coffers was dismantled, making the continuation of the income tax even more important to government finances. In 1949, just over 30 years after the tax was first introduced, the measure was finally made permanent. And we, or some of us, anyways, have been paying for it ever since.

Heritage Week - February 15 - 21

Heritage Barrie celebrated Heritage Week with a virtual tour of the Simcoe County Gaol featuring Barrie Town Crier, Stephan Travers.

Enjoy the video [here](#).



Broken Trust: Cattle Rustlers of South Simcoe by Mary Harris, Barrie Historical Archive

Simcoe County farm families have always walked a fine line between surviving and losing it all. Hard work, near continuous labour is what kept families going, always at the mercy of the weather or wild animals, while living miles from schools, doctors and shops.

They had plenty of adversities to deal with on a good day, and the last thing they needed was to be robbed by cattle rustlers.

What - cattle rustlers in Simcoe County? Yes indeed. No fictional characters from some John Wayne movie, these low-down rascals popped up more often than you would think in this part of Ontario, and the worst thing about a cattle rustler was that he was not some stranger from 'the city' but most likely a trusted neighbour.

It wasn't the easiest of crimes to commit. Stolen cattle were often driven on the hoof from their home farm to a place where they could be hidden before they were sold. It's hard not to notice several head of cattle being herded along a country road.

Canadians have always had a very low opinion of cattle thieves. Before 1865, the theft of cattle was among the long list of offences subject to the death penalty.

On November 29, 1923, the *Barrie Examiner* quoted Judge Vance as he admonished Albert Peacock, whom he had just sentenced to 2 years in Burwash Penitentiary.

"In the West a few years ago, it was the cause of nearly all the trouble the Mounted Police had to deal with. Lynching for cattle rustling was the home-grown cure in

many instances. But since that time, cattle stealing has become almost a lost art."

The reporter added "So that when such a case should come to light in Simcoe County, the interest from farmers for miles around was kindled and they trooped in to hear the facts regarding it."

Unusual as that case was at the time, one stranger still unfolded 4 years later. On the front page of the July 28, 1927 edition of the *Barrie Examiner*, two stories shared the spotlight – the death of the relatively young Judge Vance who had tried the Peacock case, and the story of a burglar killed by a homeowner near Beeton. The latter story would lead to a gang of cattle drovers and farm hands turned rustlers.

Photo courtesy of Toronto Public Library



Alex Hodge, a single farmer, received \$610 for some cattle one night and was confronted by a burglar immediately afterwards at his home. A fight ensued and the would-be robber, later identified as Dan Forsythe, ended up dead.

As a coroner's inquest was being arranged, the police were working behind the scenes in an effort to discover how the dead man came to have 2 watches, a diamond ring



Photo courtesy of Bradford West Gwillimbury

and \$157 on his person. Perhaps Forsythe had been involved in other local crimes.

Joseph McDermott and Charles Hammell, the purchasers of the cattle, when called as witnesses, denied they had any dealings with any man called Dan Forsythe. The police had already learned that Joseph McDermott, at least, was lying about that and he was arrested for perjury at the close of the inquiry.

Just prior to McDermott's arrest, local farmer, Edward Hickland, was taken into custody when goods stolen by Dan Forsyth were

found hidden on his property. An intricate web of cattle thieving, that had continued undetected for perhaps 2 years, began to come to light.

Edward Hickland was the first to break. He immediately wanted to confess and "come clean" and it was his words that led to further charges for Joseph McDermott as well as the arrests of Alfred Hart-

ley, Elwood Nevils, Reginald Andrews, Samuel Nevils, Frank Skelly, William Langley, Harry Cannon and Manning McEwan.

Two of the accused were brothers. Elwood and Samuel Nevils had stolen numerous animals from the farm of their own uncle, Job Nevils, where they were employed.

In a sad side story, an explosion at the farm that Samuel Nevils had recently rented, was for a while thought to be connected to the whole unpleasant rustling business. Within days of his arrest, 3 of Sam-

uel Nevils' children were badly injured when they accidentally set off dynamite blasting caps while playing in a shed. A six-year-old boy and a 4-year-old girl later died of their injuries.

At their October trial, all of the men but one pleaded guilty. Only Frank Skelly of Adjala Township insisted he was innocent. Joseph McDermott, believed to be the ringleader, got the most time – 6 years in the penitentiary at Kingston.

Frank Skelly was found guilty and sentenced to 2 years in prison. No

one knows the whole story but, not long after getting out, Skelly was found dead in his burning house. He had been doing odd jobs locally but could not keep up the payments on his farm, and it had been recently sold at the time of his death.

Returning to the community in which he had committed transgressions against his neighbours could not have been easy. Even the notice of his death in the *Northern Advance* contained a reminder.

“Frank Skelly, one of the Beeton cattle rustling gang, met a tragic death on Saturday evening last.”

Members Corner: Merv and Donna Wice by John Merritt, Membership Chair

This is the first of what I'd like to be a series of articles, each one focusing on a different long-standing member of the SCHA, whether it be an individual or a group. Our members are what keep us going as an organization, supporting us in many different ways, so we would like to honour the people and groups who have been an integral part of what we do at the SCHA for so long.

This time around, we will be looking at Merv and Donna Wice of Innisfil. They have been members of the SCHA since around 2003, and Donna has served on the board since 2011.

Merv and Donna joined the board of the IHS after they both retired, seeking an outlet for their newfound free time, abundant energy, and passion for the history and people of their area. Donna and Merv were initially drawn to the SCHA by its fabulous annual roast beef dinners, always hoping to share a table with fellow IHS members Ross Wallace and Alma Jobbitt.

While serving on the board of the IHS, Donna quickly became a protégé of Ross, the 17-year chair of the group's Document Center and

its representative to the SCHA board since 1998. Both Donna and Merv learned from Ross the value of taking a county-wide perspective on the history of their own township, as well as an appreciation of the work being done by local history organizations like the IHS all over Simcoe County.



Donna joined the board of the SCHA in 2011, when Ross retired as Innisfil's representative. At that time, SCHA board meetings were held at the Simcoe County Museum in Midhurst, Helen Coutts was president, and Ellen Millar and Jill Hynes were secretaries. The highlight of each year's activities was the annual dinner and AGM in May, which always drew a substantial crowd.

When she first joined the SCHA board, Donna says at first she didn't

see much value in the role; the drives to board meetings at the museum were long and she didn't feel like she was contributing much, but she was determined to help see through some of the IHS' new initiatives.

A lot has changed since then, with new faces and perspectives on the board, renewed energy, and a host of new initiatives. Donna is happy to be part of the continuing evolution of our organization. Her favourite new SCHA initiative is our annual Heritage Business Award, of which she has been a part since its inception.

If you would like to be part of steering our organization in new directions, consider joining our board executives. If you are an organizational member of the SCHA, remember that, like Innisfil Historical, you have the ability to send a representative to our board.

Have you or someone you know been a long-time member of the SCHA? Let us know at membership@simcoecountyhistory.ca or tell us how long you've been a member on this year's membership renewal form.

The Glorious Summer by Mark W. Fisher

The following article is taken from *Notes in Time, A History of W.A. Fisher and the Barrie Collegiate Band, 1938-1972* by Mark W. Fisher. The full work will shortly be made available to the public online and may be obtained by contacting the author at mwfisher2@hotmail.com.

Any accounting of the Barrie Collegiate Band will show that it increasingly operated on a twelve month basis after 1950. Before that time, my mother and father spent most of the summer in their hometown of Cobourg, where they could renew ties with family and friends. There was also the lure of the Rice Lake cottage, constructed and maintained since 1941 with the help of a long list of willing students. By 1949, however, surrounding development had lessened its appeal and my sisters had outgrown it. Moreover, my father's energy had turned to the construction of a new home on Sunnidale Road and the Rice Lake property was sold shortly thereafter. Consequently, he was now more available and the summer programme just grew and grew.

For the members of the band, this increased activity became the focus of a time that would surely go on forever, peculiar to the arduous of youth during the long hot summer. Freed at last from all academic constraints, the continuing band rehearsals meant repeated chances to meet with friends and concentrate on what was really uppermost in a teenage brain--without forgetting the music, of course! The summer prom concerts, the competitions at the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) and particularly jaunts to the Muskoka playground to the north, were merely the icing on the cake.

Before this, the band had been sporadically active during the summer, although this was usually at the end of June exams or the first week of July, if Fisher could be prevailed upon to take part in the annual Dominion Day festivities, now known as Canada Day. The Waterloo Music Festival of 1943 had been a one-off, yet the band did appear there once again in 1957. This time they were more successful in winning the senior band class, as well as a first award while marching in a lengthy parade all the way from Kitchener. I remember it well since a bee stung my thigh right where flesh rubbed my parade drum, just before we stepped off in the sweltering heat.

A decade earlier, in August 1948, the municipal leaders of Cobourg persuaded Fisher to bring a marching band for the centennial celebrations of the town. At the head of the monster parade the band set out led by the majorettes and their own illustrious son. I brought up the tail end of the extended procession as part of a contingent of seven boys, aligned from tallest to smallest. Dressed in coveralls and straw hats with corn cob pipes clenched between our teeth, and made up in politically incorrect "blackface," each of us wore a cardboard box that bore the same word on all four sides. Together we spelled out "That's-All-Folks-There-Ain't-No-More." At age seven there wasn't much of me but I was "More."

It was actually in 1952 that the activities of the band picked up on a sustained basis during the summer. Annual appearances at the CNE regularly marked the end of the season with a growing list of venues during the preceding eight weeks. Beginning in 1951, one of

the most memorable of these was a late June appearance at Bigwin Inn for the annual convention of the School Trustees and Ratepayers Association of Ontario, an organization that retained this anachronistic appellation for some time. Elected representatives of school boards they may have been, but the need to have "ratepayers" -- also known as municipal taxpayers--declare themselves Catholic or Protestant became obsolete when Mike Harris decided to fund all schools from general revenues in 1997. Now it merely serves as an indicator of which school board you can vote for in municipal elections. Non-Christians and atheists, I guess, are simply out of luck!

Therefore, with all expenses paid for, the request for the services of the band could hardly be ignored, even if some grade 13s were still beset with "departmental" exams. Located on the 520 acres of Bigwin Island named after Chief John Big Wind, Bigwin Inn was hardly Buckingham Palace yet this affair had all the air of a command performance. And for teenagers made giddy by the euphoria of the endless summer stretching before them, it was far superior since Bigwin Inn still reigned as one of the outstanding resorts in the land.

Constructed in 1920 by Charles Shaw, a Huntsville businessman, and designed by John Wilson, a Collingwood architect, Bigwin Inn boasted 350 rooms, the Indian Head Dining Room for 750 and a large, octagonal dance pavilion with extensive boat facilities underneath. Nestled in a sheltered bay, the entire complex also retained a pleasing aspect that did justice to its natural surroundings. During the affluence of its glory days, Bigwin

Inn attracted the rich and famous from the likes of Ernest Hemingway, H.G. Wells and John D. Rockefeller, to the Dutch royal family, who summered there during the war, and even Winston Churchill. Movie stars such as Clark Gable and Greta Garbo graced its guest register, while the "big bands" of the era entertained for the benefit of all in the dance pavilion that doubled as a spacious concert hall. Clearly, the Barrie Collegiate Band had some big shoes to fill in playing such a locale.

A warmup for the Bigwin Inn appearance was provided the evening before when the band performed for the Collingwood Summer Theatre, on the outdoor stage of the modest Blue Mountain ski lodge. With a half dozen runs and a few rope tows to service them, there was still a rural ambience to this winter amenity and no hint of the massive development that has since overtaken it. Yet these misty hills have always held an allure that intensifies and enwraps me whenever I approach them, a sensation that I can only attribute to this initial encounter. Actually, I was lucky enough to simply arrive, for my parents had entrusted me to Miro Messesnail, the ebullient young opera singer who had recently come to the notice of W. A. Fisher. A new immigrant he may have been, but the family fortune recently extricated from communist Hungary had blessed Miro with a huge new Buick. Proceeding just north of Barrie, he laughed uproariously as he told "the Mark not to worry," in very broken English. Meanwhile I watched him bury the speedometer needle well past 100 miles per hour, as we descended the then narrow funnel of the two-lane deathtrap at the foot of Paddy Dunn's hill. During the concert before a modest crowd, while Miro enthralled with

operatic arias and the band played on, I was drawn more to the hills behind. At age 10, surely they equaled Everest or at least the Rockies! I don't know if I made the summit, but the vision of the setting sun on the blue waters beyond remains with me in the stillness of the warm evening air, while the strains of the music from the red and white dots below drifted faintly upwards.

In 1951 I was dragged along to Bigwin Inn, but a return visit for the School Trustees in 1955 remains more clearly in my mind, for given the run of the place we promptly took over the somnolent swimming dock and solitary diving tower. It must have been one of the very few times I saw my father don swimwear, for only a Saharan heatwave could ever induce him to consider such an option. One way or the other, I do know that he got decidedly wet. I also led some of my friends up the trail to the concrete observation tower at the summit of a steep hill that I discovered in 1951. Built as a cylindrical water tower of over one hundred feet in height, it was accessed for half the distance by a circular stairway on the exterior, then an interior staircase--without any railing--followed by the rungs of a metal ladder that led through a hole in the observation platform. From there, beneath a sheltering roof, one could look out over a Muskoka landscape of unrivalled lake and forest. It was said by guests and staff alike that this lofty perch was reputedly the place for a lovers tryst, even if you couldn't see much on a moonless night. I am sure half the excitement was just in getting there.

For band members visiting Bigwin Inn at any time, half the fun was in transporting personnel and baggage to and from the island. A fleet of smaller launches could be called on

for such amphibious operations while the main ferry could handle most situations. Constructed in 1910, the S.S. Bigwin at 66 feet in length was capacious enough for normal circumstances, if somewhat careworn. It served admirably in the grand Muskoka tradition until 1970 and the closure of Bigwin Inn. The entire resort had simply become too unprofitable and amid some controversy the new owners subdivided the island into million-dollar lots. Only a portion of the main building was retained in the form of refurbished condominiums. The dining room still operates but the dance pavilion, where the Barrie Collegiate Band and so many others once performed, was demolished. The S.S. Bigwin, partially sunk at its moorings for some 20 years, was on its way to oblivion when a heritage organization took on a restoration project two decades in the making. Today the spirit of Bigwin Inn sails on in the form of this namesake steamship.

Britannia was another of the Muskoka resorts that remains in my memory, partly for its greater intimacy and the fact we were given the run of the place, complete with all available watercraft. Most of the aging clientele seemed to be a bit beyond that. Established as early as 1905 by Thomas White of Huntsville, it was completely rebuilt by his son as a spacious three-storey lodge in 1954. This included a sun-lit meeting room, large enough to accommodate the band and an audience of guests and locals, while being entertained by the band in the following summer. On a return visit in 1956, the band was joined by Lilli Petrie, a talented young soprano from the Toronto Conservatory, who also doubled as the social host at Britannia. So it was only logical that she was included in the Barrie prom concert,

held in August, along with the twelve members of the Willy Blok Hanson dance troupe from Toronto. Ms. Petri and the band entertained with songs by Victor Herbert and two hits, "You'll Never Walk Alone" and "If You Loved Me," from the very popular musical "Carousel." Her voice more than capably filled the vast space of the Barrie arena and was not overpowered by the band. Willy Blok Hanson, listed as a "choreographic artiste," followed with colourful impersonations of celebrities such as Liberace, Marcel Marceau and Eartha Kitt. Her company, along with the band, added the fire of "Jamaican Rumba," and not to be outdone was the tiny figure of her young daughter in several solo numbers.

This left the rest of the night to Rafael Mendez in the second appearance of this trumpet virtuoso in Barrie. Once again, he delighted the 1,500 in attendance with his personal charm and the fireworks of his chosen instrument. Added to some of his standard numbers the audience now expected to hear was the "Gypsy Dance" from "Carmen" and "Gypsy Airs" by Sarasate, still a mainstay of the violin repertoire. For its part, a much reduced band because of summer conflicts added lighter fare in keeping with the occasion. A good number of graduates ensured that the quality did not suffer, particularly on the more serious selections such as the Holst "Second Suite in F," which was carried off with "professional polish and style."

Two weeks later the band returned to Gravenhurst, with much the same programme, for its by now annual appearance on the Gull Lake "musical barge." These regular performances began as early as 1951 when it actually was a floating platform that billowed and

swayed when you moved upon it. I recall that it was always a feat to navigate the connecting walkway and main stage when transporting heavy drum equipment or getting sousaphone players into place. Some band members even experienced queasy stomachs, akin to seasickness, when performing at this venue. Nevertheless, it made for a great summer outing at least once every summer for the band. By the late 1960s, it was often combined with an afternoon concert at the Manitouwabing Music Camp which still flourishes today. Eventually a number of the leading players from the Barrie Collegiate Band attended this camp for several summers, and enjoyed the expert instruction that it offered.

Although Mendez had performed for a packed audience of 3,500 in Toronto just before his appearance in Barrie, it was impossible to book him for Gravenhurst. In his stead, Eldon Lehman of the Toronto Symphony filled in with the Haydn trumpet concerto, along with Lili Petrie. And to bring this very successful season to a conclusion, there was the late August performance of the band at the CNE. There was no competition in the top class for a band of only 45, but many hours of preparation on Dvorak's final movement from his "New World Symphony" were still necessary. Performed in the heat and confinement of a large marquis tent it still garnered a first prize of \$750.

Just how intense these summer programmes could be is illustrated by the ten appearances, in the summer of 1960 that began with a late June return to Bigwin Inn, followed by marching in the Dominion Day parade in Barrie. A week later there was participation in the Burk's Falls centennial celebrations and an evening concert in Orillia's

Aquatheatre. Next, came an afternoon performance at the Manitouwabing Music Camp, hosted by Paul Brodie, and a full concert on the "musical barge" in Gravenhurst with the baritone voice of Brendan Gerrard as the featured soloist. This was followed by a second appearance in Gravenhurst with, an all-new programme in August, and then a short trip to nearby New Lowell as part of the Sunnidale Township Centennial. Gravenhurst was one thing, where the popularity of the band always ensured a large and appreciative audience. New Lowell proved to be something else in a packed and cramped hall. Shortly into the programme there was a distinct hum of conversation that largely drowned out the soft passages, as Fisher diplomatically pointed out. Although somewhat chastened by his words, the conversation only increased to a dull roar when the band tried again. Fisher now resorted to his strongest schoolteacher manner in pointing out how hard his young musicians were striving to please, but the decibel level soon approached ear-splitting within a few bars of the next number. Thoroughly exasperated after 30 minutes of such verbal abuse, Fisher called for "O Canada" and the band hastily packed up and departed the scene. Now thoroughly engaged in old home week the locals barely noticed.

After such a rejection in the hinterland, it was a relief to return to Barrie and the dilapidated pavilion in Queen's Park where you only had to contend with barking dogs and a baseball game, followed by the rewards, both monetary and otherwise, of a first and second to close out the summer at the CNE.

Newton Robinson Fireside Chat now on YouTube by Janine Harris-Wheatley and

Mark Burchell Photo credits: Mark Burchell

In October of 2019, the Tecumseth and West Gwillimbury Historical Society (TWGHS) hosted a Fireside Chat at Tec-We-Gwill WI Hall in Newton Robinson. A panel of six long-time residents reminisced about local historical events and figures from the past who were well-known in the surrounding communities. Bob Sturgeon of Bradford, Charlie Wilcox of Beeton, Lloyd West of Pinkerton, Bill Vernon of Fisher's Corners and Doug Jebb and Nancy Bell of Newton Robinson vividly recalled tales from their childhood, bringing tears of laughter and sorrow to the capacity audience. It continues to be one of our most well-remembered programs.



Bill Vernon

Fortunately TWGHS member George Phillips films our monthly programs. Mark Burchell, who organized the original event, has now posted the Fireside Chat on his public YouTube channel, "Life in South Simcoe County". To enjoy this delightful program, go to the YouTube app or website and search "Life in South Simcoe County" to locate the Fireside Chat playlist. The original video has been edited into nine short episodes.

[Episode 1](#): Introduction of the pan-

elists

[Episode 2](#): In 1927, the village of Beeton was the centre of a series of unexplained events, including the regular disappearance of cattle and pigs from local farms and the death of a mysterious would-be burglar. Doug Jebb and Bob Sturgeon share stories of the Beeton Cattle rustling ring that was uncovered following a life and death struggle between Alex Hodge and burglar Dan Forsythe. Bob reveals his childhood impressions of Joseph McDermott, the alleged ringleader of the gang.



Doug Jebb



Bob Sturgeon

[Episode 3](#): On March 13, 1941, two Avro Anson trainers from Number 31 Air Navigation School at Port Albert, Ontario were involved in a midair collision over Bond Head. Charlie Wilcox recalls being out in the school yard during lunch and seeing the airborne collision. Bob Sturgeon provides some background information that he collected while doing research for one of his books.

[Episode 4](#): Construction of Highway 400 began in 1944. Lloyd West tells about a First Nations burial ground that was discovered near Bradford during this construction.



Lloyd West

[Episode 5](#): In the early afternoon of July 26, 1951, bank robbers hit the Bradford branch of the Bank of Commerce. Bob Sturgeon proudly recalls how his wife Doris, who was the manager and chief operator at the Bradford telephone exchange, was involved in notifying the OPP about the armed robbery. Bob also recalls that he and his sister Jean were working in the field cutting wheat when they watched an OPP police car drive by at high speed towards Bradford.



Charlie Wilcox

[Episode 6](#): On October 15, 1954, Hurricane Hazel struck Southern Ontario. Charlie Wilcox shares stories of a successful rescue and a tragic loss. Doug Jebb talks about the farm animals drowned by the heavy flooding.

[Episode 7](#): Nancy Bell recalls her years at Newton Robinson school.

She and Lloyd West remember the warnings from their parents to not accept rides from strangers, relating to the tragic story of the abduction and murder of a young child, Thomasena Baker, in the area in August of 1962. Doug Jebb describes the search efforts and mentions that he was called for jury duty, but not selected.



Nancy Bell

[Episode 8](#): Charlie Wilcox recalls the April 3, 1975 snowstorm that dropped more than one foot of snow and the strong winds that created towering fifteen foot drifts that hampered road travel for several days.

[Episode 9](#): The panelists then take turns reminiscing about a number of memorable local residents, in particular Gordon Bradley (milk truck driver), Gordon Breedon (blacksmith), Vernon Connell (plumber, woodworker, and general handyman), Russell Copeland (drover), and the Honourable Earl Rowe (former Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, and breeder, owner, trainer, and driver of championship standardbred race horses). The evening concludes with a lively discussion as audience members add to the tales of the people and events

that have so vividly been brought to life. Dave Merkley shares a personal story about the 1975 snowstorm when he and his fellow teachers were storm-stayed at the Schomberg school for several days.

Two of the participants, Bob Sturgeon and Dave Merkley, have since passed away. Being able to see their faces and hear their voices once again has been a special gift for their families and friends.

If enough people like and subscribe, then more of the TWGHS programs may be uploaded to the Life in South Simcoe County YouTube channel to join the chickens, puppies, and maple syrup production videos that inform and entertain.

Member Societies

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Box 88 Alliston ON 705-435-5626
Contact [Carolyn Knowles](#)

Archives of Ontario Library
Contact [Frank Van Kalmthout](#)

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Bass Lake Rate Payers Association
12 Ward Ave Oro-Medonte ON
705-955-2262 basslakera@gmail.com

[Bradford/West Gwillimbury Public Library](#)

Bradford/West Gwillimbury Local History Association
Contact [Jan Blommaert](#)

[Coldwater Canadian Heritage Museum](#)

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

[The Cookstown Community Development Team](#)
Deb Crawford contact at 705-791-2051 or [Email](#)

Essa Historical Society

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[Friends of Fort Willow](#)
Contact [Bryan Wesson](#)

Heritage Barrie
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[Historic Military Establishment of Upper Canada](#)
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Huronina Chapter, Ontario Archeological Society
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Huronina Museum Box 638, 549 Little Lake Park Rd. Midland ON, 705-526-2844
huroniamuseum@gmail.com

[Innisfil Historical Society](#)
[Contact](#) Donna Wice

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

[Orillia Museum of Art and History](#)
Contact 705-326-2159

[Orillia Public Library](#) 36 Mississauga St. W Orillia,
705-325-2338 jturvey@orilliapubliclibrary.ca

[Ramara Historical Society](#)
Contact [Cathy Westcott](#)

Simcoe County Archives
1149 Hwy 26 Minesing ON, 705-726-9331
archives@simcoe.ca

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

[Stayner Heritage Society](#)
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Tecumseth & West Gwillimbury Historical Society
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148 Line 7 South Oro-Medonte ON L0L 2E0
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Township of Tiny
Contact [Pamela Zimmerman](#)

Please contact organizations directly for current information as regularly scheduled events or meetings may be cancelled due to Covid-19