



The Historical Society of St. Catharines

P.O. Box 25017, 221 Glendale Avenue, Pen Centre, St. Catharines, Ontario L2T 4C4

Our mission and goal is to increase the knowledge and appreciation of the history of St. Catharines and area. The Society was founded in 1927. Our Society is affiliated with the Ontario Historical Society.

The Society gratefully acknowledges the support of the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Culture.

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June 2019 Newsletter

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100 YEARS AGO



The year 1919 was a year of change in St. Catharines and all around the world, following the signing of the Armistice in November 1918 that ended the Great War. Communities were impacted by the returning veterans and by those who did not return. The organization that is today known as **Community Care of St. Catharines and Thorold** was formed in 1919 in response to local needs for social assistance. Initially, a small founding group operated a basic program that offered food and clothing to the less advantaged of the community.

Today, with a century of service, the Community Care team includes an army of volunteers working with community partners and agencies. With donations from the public and grants agency funding, they operate a number of social service programs. Today's programs include the food bank, community gardens, housing support, medical, dental and vision care, and emergency services. Over 1,850 families access the food bank every month. Thank you for 100 years of Community Care!

MARCH 28 MEETING: DR. KIMBERLY MONK, We Dig the Shickluna Shipyard



The March HSSC meeting was one of the highest attended lectures of the season with Dr. Monk presenting to a capacity crowd. The update included background information that explains why the shipyard site is significant: the importance of the shipyard and shipbuilding to the local mid-19th century economy, the purpose-built features of the Shickluna canaller ship design and the layout of the dry dock and shipyard buildings at the site which Monk described as important locally and nationally. The site was used as a shipyard from 1827 until it closed in 1891, and was then used as a box and basket factory until 1901.

A team of specialists including some from Brock University faculty will descend upon the site this summer to uncover mysteries from over 100 years ago. Dr. Monk will be teaching a full-credit course through Brock entitled "Field School in Local Historical Archaeology", July 15 – August 16, 2019 that will include lectures, workshops and a field trip to the site. For course information, visit

www.brocku.ca/humanities/archaeologyfieldschool. There are also opportunities for volunteers from the community to participate in the project. For more information or to join as a volunteer this summer, email shicklunashipyard@gmail.com or visit www.historicenvironment.ca

APRIL 25, 2019 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM),

The 2019 Annual General Meeting (AGM) took place with a full house in attendance. The meeting highlights included:

- HSSC Memberships: we have 113 fully paid memberships;
- Lecture Programs: Dan Sundry steps down as HSSC Program Director with four (4) board members Gail Benjafield, Pat Richardson, Roger Bradshaw and Elizabeth Finnie now sharing responsibility for organizing the monthly lecture series;
- Refreshments: Roger Bradshaw manages the refreshments offered at each general meeting;
- The HSSC members voted to approve two items:
 - a minor change to the Constitution to allow all members of the board to initiate an extra board meeting;
 - an increase to Membership dues to offset rising operational costs including the newsletter production, monthly meeting room rental and to fund special projects in line with the Society's mission and goal to increase knowledge and appreciation of the history of St. Catharines and area; effective September 2019, annual HSSC dues are \$15 for single members and \$20 for family memberships;
- Election of Board Members: The officers for the 2019-2020 HSSC Season are President Dave Willer, Vice-President Brian Narhi, Past President Nancy Cameron, Treasurer Chris Loat, and Secretary Elizabeth Finnie. Directors are Gail Benjafield, Roger Bradshaw, John Brenton, John Burtiak, John Calvert, Des Corran, Dennis Gannon, Pat Richardson, and Dan Sundry.

Note: the full minutes of the 2019 AGM will be published in the newsletter immediately before the April 23, 2020 AGM. HSSC members will have a more timely opportunity to read the minutes prior to being asked to vote on their approval at the next AGM.

APRIL 25 MEETING: ROGER BRADSHAW, Postcards from Port Dalhousie

Following the Annual General Meeting, Roger Bradshaw presented historical postcards of Port Dalhousie from the personal collection of John Burtiak. The pair has collaborated on a new book featuring many images that take us back to the period of time when Port Dalhousie, as the terminus of the Welland Canal, boasted a busy harbour crowded with passenger and cargo ships. The Lakeside Park beach and amusements were a popular tourist destination with rail lines linking Port Dalhousie to Niagara Falls to extend the tourist experience.



MAY 23 MEETING: NANCY CAMERON, St. Paul Street Stories

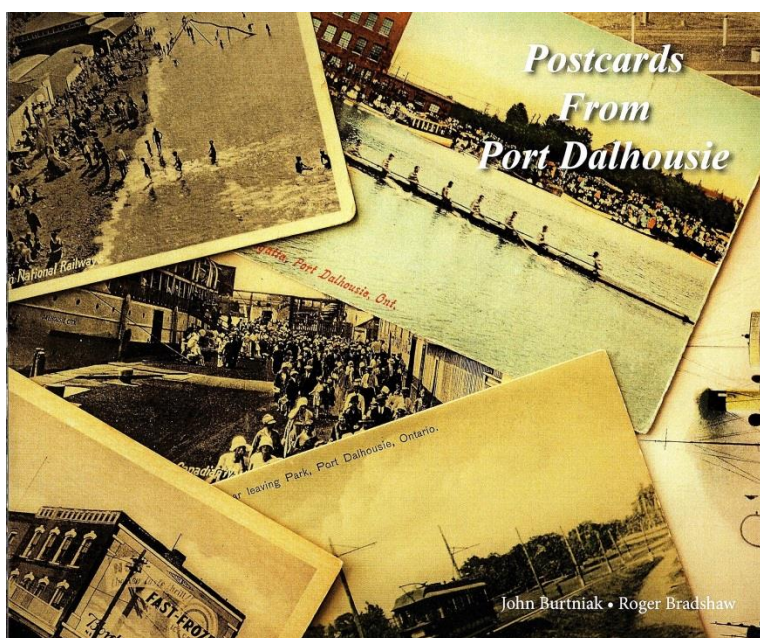


Nancy Cameron led us on a virtual end-to-end walking tour of St. Paul Street, St. Catharines.

The curved street traces its origins as the early Iroquois trail that followed the ridge above the Twelve Mile Creek. From the Oak Hill mansion located at Yates Street, the former estate of Welland Canal magnate William Hamilton Merritt (now CKTB radio station), we were guided through the downtown core exploring points of interest along St. Paul Street all the way to Geneva Street at the other end. The lecture included photographs of historical buildings and accompanying background stories. While many buildings have remained relatively unchanged, several have been demolished, stripped of architectural interest or replaced with modern structures. These inevitable changes and the stories behind them are why the preservation of the history is so essential.

POSTCARDS FROM PORT DALHOUSIE

By John Burtiak & Roger Bradshaw



This rare collection of vintage postcards from the John Burtiak collection is not to be missed. This book is essential if you have a personal connection to Port Dalhousie, an interest in the history of the Port or in the novelty of old postcards. Copies of actual picture postcards are artfully displayed on 94 pages showcasing the best of Port Dalhousie in its early glory years. Most of the postcards are one-of-a-kind and haven't been available in any public archive in over 100 years. At \$35 this book would make a fine addition to your personal library or as a thoughtful gift for that special someone.

To order your copy contact Roger Bradshaw by phone (905) 935-1006 or email RogerBradshaw41@hotmail.com.

175 INTERESTING THINGS TO SEE IN ST. CATHARINES

A series describing local historical emplacements, by Bill Stevens

PLAQUE HONOURING RICHARD PIERPOINT

Thirty five years ago on Sunday, May 27, 1984 a ceremony was held to unveil an historical plaque in honor of Richard Pierpoint. The ceremony was held at 11 a.m. at the British Methodist Episcopal, Salem Chapel. Pierpoint, locally known as Captain Dick, was the first black settler of Grantham Township.



During the American Revolution he had served in Butler's Rangers and when Butler's Rangers were disbanded on June 24, 1784 the disbanded members were given land grants in Niagara. Pierpoint received his land grant of 200 acres in Lots 13 and 14, Concession 6 Grantham Township. These lands are bounded by Welland Avenue on the north, Eastchester Avenue on the South, Grantham Avenue South on the east and Vine Street South on the west. The accompanying recent map shows the area where the lands were located.

Part of his lands touch Centennial Park and the plaque is located just north of the parking lot entrance on the west side of Oakdale Avenue. Nearby Dick's Creek, a tributary of Twelve Mile Creek, was named after him. In November 1806, Pierpoint sold lot 13 to Robert Hamilton and traded lot 12 to Garret Schram for an equivalent 100 acres in lots 7 and 8 in concession 2 Louth Township. He made his will out in 1829 while living in Louth, but the lands left his ownership sometime before 1834.

He fought with the coloured company in the War of 1812 and for his service he received lands in 1822 in the Township of Garafraxa. At the time of the land grant he was living in St. Catharines. He moved to Garafraxa and cleared five acres and built a house by May of 1823, but shortly afterwards moved back to Louth. It is unknown where he was living when he died likely in 1838, his will was probated in Queenston in 1838. His place of burial is unknown.



The plaque inscription is as follows:

RICHARD PIERPOINT c1744 - c1838

One of the first Black settlers in this region. Pierpoint was born in Senegal. At the age of about 16 he was imprisoned and shipped to America where he became the slave of a British officer. During the American Revolution he enlisted in the British forces, thereby gaining his freedom, and served with Butler's Rangers. Disbanded at Niagara, "Captain Dick" settled near here. At the outbreak of the War of 1812 he joined the Coloured Corps and in 1821, recalling his militia service, he petitioned the government for passage home to Africa. Although his request was denied, the aged Pierpoint was granted land in present-day Fergus. Remarkably he fulfilled the required settlement duties when over 80 and then apparently returned to this area.

Although his request was denied, the aged Pierpoint was granted land in present-day Fergus. Remarkably he fulfilled the required settlement duties when over 80 and then apparently returned to this area. Erected by the Ontario Heritage Foundation, Ministry of Citizenship and Culture.

MUSEUM ONLINE

Niagara history buffs with a computer and Internet access are directed to the website of the St. Catharines Museum & Welland Canals Centre for a veritable cornucopia of historical treasures. "Museum Chat" covers a broad array of categories, and "Museum Chat Live!" includes audio podcasts: a series on the fallen workers of the Welland Canal, rowing at Henley, the Arts and Crafts Movement, and other topics of local historical interest. <https://stcatharinesmuseumblog.com/category/podcasts/museum-chat-live/>



The new online Museum collection was demonstrated by Anthony Percival at the recent HSSC meeting. The [eMuseum](#) provides a digital portal where the public can search for items from the Collection, organized into various categories. Included is a large volume of photographs from the St. Catharines Standard collection that provides an interesting view of the city over a 62 year span. It's an excellent source for your next research project.

STRANGERS, KIDNAPPINGS AND ST. CATHARINES - or - Beware of the Candy Man

by Brian Narhi

News reports concerning kidnappings, the abduction of children, and amber alerts are all too common in our present age. One of the first cases of kidnapping accompanied by a ransom request occurred in the United States in July 1874, nearly 60 years before the infamous Lindbergh baby case (1932.) Through a curious twist of events, St. Catharines briefly became the focus of the 1874 investigation and gained notoriety through newspaper coverage across North America.

The story began in Germantown, Pennsylvania where Christian K. Ross, a well-to-do Philadelphia dry-goods merchant, resided with his wife Sarah and their seven children. The two youngest boys in the family were six-year old Walter and four-year old Charles Brewster Ross. "Charley," born on May 4, 1870, was described as a "chubby little fellow with long flaxen curls." He was an intelligent, out-going child, who was "a favourite with all who met him." He and his brother were inseparable companions.



On June 27, 1874, Walter and Charley had been playing in the front yard of their home when they were approached by two men in a buggy who offered the boys some candy. Neither of the boys could identify who these strangers were when their father questioned them about it. Christian did not worry himself about the matter any further that day, assuming that "someone fond of children had, as an act of kindness, given candy to the boys." Unfortunately, Walter and Charley neglected to tell their father that the same men stopped by with more gifts of candy during the ensuing three days.

On July 1st the men appeared once again, and Charley (undoubtedly with a mouth full of sweets) precociously asked for some firecrackers. The men told the boys to get into the buggy and they would drive them to a store where the purchase would be made. Rather than taking them to the nearest store, which worried Walter, the boys were driven some 8 miles away from their home.

The men stopped in front of a store where Walter was given 25 cents and instructions on what he was to purchase. When he came back out, the buggy and his brother were gone. Poor Walter was lost, frightened, and crying hysterically for Charley when another stranger named Henry Peacock kindly took charge of the lad and safely returned him home. Walter provided details about the abduction once he had settled down. Various theories were posited for the kidnapping: that Charley had been taken by gypsies, or that the boy's father had staged the abduction for the sake of notoriety and as a gimmick to boost business at his shop.

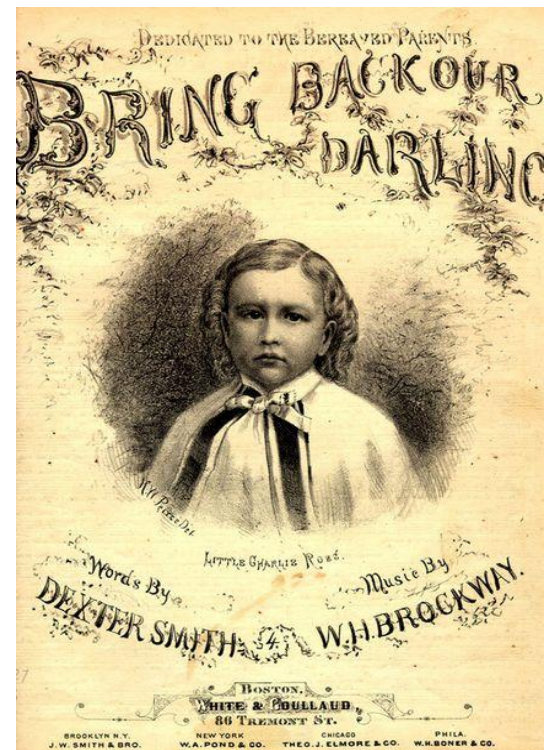
On July 3rd, Christian Ross received a crudely worded ransom note from the kidnappers: *“July 3—Mr. Ros: be not uneasy you son charly be all writ we is got him and no powers on earth can deliver out of our hand. you wil hav two pay us befor you git him from us, and pay us a big cent to. if you put the cops hunting for him you is only defeeting yu own end. we is got him put so no living power can gets him from us a live. if any aproch is made to his hidin place that is the signil for his instant anihilation. if you regard his lif puts no one to search for him yu money can fetch him out alive an no other existin powers. dont deceve yuself an think the detectives can git him from us for that is imposebel. you here from us in few days.”*

This was followed by a second note on July 6th which demanded a ransom of \$20,000 which was a considerable sum for that period. The kidnappers threatened to kill Charley if the ransom was not paid or if the police became involved in the case. A series of notes were exchanged between Mr. Ross and the kidnappers, with instructions to run an ad in the Philadelphia Ledger newspaper when he was “ready to negotiate.” The kidnappers expressed their frustration and impatience with Ross especially after he replied that he would “not compound a felony by paying money to the monsters who committed this atrocious crime.”

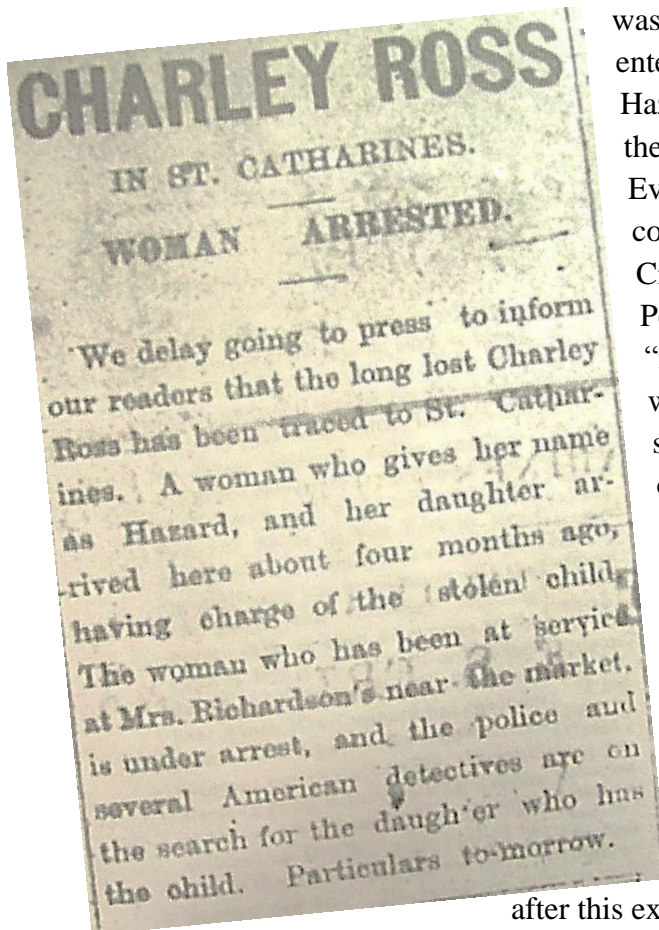
On July 22nd, the mayor of Philadelphia posted a reward of \$20,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the criminals. On the same day Mr. Ross sent a note to the kidnappers stating that he would comply with their request. On July 30 the abductors instructed Ross to procure a valise and, after painting it white, to put \$20,000 in small bills inside and take the train leaving at midnight for New York. He was instructed to stand on the rear platform of the last car. This train was due to arrive in New York about one hour after sunrise. He was cautioned to be on the alert from the moment the train left the depot, and if he saw a torch and a white flag waved at night time near the track or a white flag alone in the day time, he should throw the valise instantly. The valise was painted white so that it could be more easily located in the dark. If it was found to contain the money demanded, the child would be restored to the parents within ten hours. Ross procured the valise and proceeded on the journey, but instead of \$20,000, it simply contained a letter in which he stated that he would not pay the money until he saw his child before him. He took his position on the rear car and made the entire journey but seeing no signal he returned home. The kidnappers sent an ultimatum saying that the simultaneous exchange of money for the child was not possible, and that Charley would be killed.

On August 2nd the New York police believed that they had identified one of the abductors as William Mosher (alias Johnson.) Mosher, who was a boat builder by trade, was also the manufacturer of a moth preventative which he peddled in the countryside as a travelling salesman. Mosher had been in trouble with the law on previous occasions (wanted for larceny, prison escape, &c) but more importantly he and an accomplice named Joseph Douglas (alias Clark) had planned to kidnap one of the Vanderbilt children in April of that same year and hold it ransom for \$50,000.

By the autumn of 1874 the abductors still held Charley captive and no ransom money had been paid. Men from the Pinkerton's Detective Agency were called upon to try to resolve this case and to secure the safe release of Charley. A sentimental song was published around that time which was titled “Bring Back Our Darling.” Proceeds from its sale were turned over to assist the family in their search for the boy.



On November 13th, a story was published in the newspapers (including the St. Catharines Daily Times and the Toronto Globe) which reported that little Charley Ross was in St. Catharines where he had been living for four months. It was said that he had been brought here by an old woman named Mrs. Hazard (or Gazzard) and her daughter, Mrs. Penfield. Hazard/Gazzard was then “in service at Mrs. Richardson’s near the market” as a nursemaid for her ailing husband and that she resided above Mr. E.A. Wright’s store at the corner of St. Paul and Academy Streets. Detectives were immediately dispatched from New York, and with the assistance of the local police one of the officers “penetrated to Mr. Wright’s sleeping room without giving warning of his approach.” Wright pushed the sergeant out of the room and collared him against the wall where their business



was hurriedly explained. A ladder was used to reach and then enter the second story window of the room occupied by Mrs. Hazzard. She informed the police upon being questioned that the child was her grandson, named William H. Evarts (aka Evans), and that her daughter (Penfield) had purely by coincidence abducted the boy from his father in New York City at the exact time that Charley Ross had been kidnapped. Penfield claimed the child was her own and watched it closely “never allowing it out of her sight, or to play on the streets with other children.” The detectives were satisfied with the story and returned to New York. As a postscript to this part of the tale, the newspapers also reported that “one of the gentlemen...from New York” was charged with assaulting George Wright and fined “25 cents without costs” by the local police magistrate and then released. The editor of the Daily Times noted that Wright was “most wicked” in “aiding in secreting the child...for the women who have the child are guilty of perjury [sic] and forgery in addition to kidnapping a child to which they have no legal claim” (Daily Times, Nov. 14, 1874.) Hazzard, her daughter and grandson appear to have moved away from St. Catharines

after this exposé became public knowledge.

The focus of the Charley Ross investigation turned once again to New York City. Mr. Ross had been given instructions by the kidnappers to send two family members to the Fifth Avenue Hotel on November 18th with the ransom money. A messenger would call using the code name or phrase “Saul of Tarsus.” The family members (Mr. Ross’ brother and nephew) were told not to leave the hotel room for the entire day. The messenger would be secretly watched by accomplices of the kidnappers, and Charley would be killed if the police made any attempt to follow. If all conditions were met, Charley would be released within ten hours. The messenger failed to show up, even though the Ross men waited patiently at the hotel for the entire day.

In the early morning hours of December 14, 1874, two men were shot while attempting to burglarize the home of I.H. Van Brunt at Bay Ridge just outside of New York City. The first, who was killed instantly, was William Mosher. The other, who was mortally wounded, confessed to police that he was Mosher’s accomplice Joseph Douglas and that they had abducted Charley Ross earlier that year in order to “make money.” The dying man’s words played out like some scene from a Victorian melodrama. Before he expired Douglas claimed that Mosher was the only person who knew where Charley was confined, and that he had started to make plans for a direct

exchange of ransom money for the lad. Police contacted Mosher's widow who said that she knew about the abduction but had no idea where the child was to be found. William Westervelt, the brother-in-law of Mosher, was identified as the man responsible for writing the ransom letter and other notes. He was found guilty and sentenced to seven years in prison for his complicity in the crime.

Eyewitnesses were brought in from Philadelphia, including young Walter Ross, who positively identified the deceased men (facially, as well as by Mosher's deformed nose and one withered finger) as the strangers who had given them candy and abducted them. Mr. Ross immediately offered a \$5,000 reward for the safe return of Charley. The Pennsylvania State Legislature passed a law in February 1875 which defined the offence of "kidnapping" and its punishment. Immunity from prosecution was granted to anyone who safely returned Charley to his parents before the end of March in that year. Despite these assurances the real Charley Ross was never seen alive again.

Mr. Ross spent more than \$60,000 during the next two decades in the search for his missing son, and he interviewed more than 570 boys who bogusly claimed to be Charley. He also published an account of the ordeal suffered by the family which was titled *The Father's Story of Charley Ross, the Kidnapped Child*. Christian Ross died in June 1897, and his wife fruitlessly continued the search for their son until her death in December 1912. Walter Ross worked as a stockbroker, and he continued to receive letters throughout the 1920s from men claiming to be Charley. Walter died in 1943.

In 1934, Gustave Blair, a 69-year-old carpenter living in Phoenix, Arizona, petitioned the courts to recognize him as the real Charley Ross. Blair claimed that he lived in a cave after he was abducted and was later informed of his "true identity" by a man who adopted him. Walter Ross dismissed Blair's claim and called him "a crank." Blair's claim was uncontested and in March 1939 the court ruled that Blair was "Charles Brewster Ross." The Ross family refused to recognize Blair as their relative. Blair moved to Los Angeles where he unsuccessfully attempted to sell his life story to a movie studio, and then lived in Germantown with his wife for a short time before moving back to Phoenix where he died in December 1943--- still claiming that he was Charley Ross.

LECTURE PROGRAM - JUNE 2019



JUNE 27 Preserving Your Family History, by St. Catharines Museum and Welland Canals Centre staff members. Candace Vanstaalduinen and Will MacEachern offer advice on preserving your family's oral histories and precious photographs.

The 2018-2019 HSSC season draws to a close with the final presentation only days away on Thursday June 27 at 7:30pm at the St. Catharines Museum at Lock 3. The 2019-2020 HSSC lecture series will resume on September 26 following a summer hiatus. Another winning line-up of presentations will be announced in the next newsletter. Thank you for renewing your HSSC membership to support the Society, enabling us to attract quality speakers on a wide variety of historical topics of local interest.

SUMMER SUGGESTIONS

Take some time this summer to discover local history through activities and events in the area. Here are just a few suggestions for you to consider:

St. Catharines Downtown Full Moon Ghost Walks are held every month under the full moon. Reserve your spot on a Ghost Walk and explore the history and haunted tales of downtown St. Catharines. The summer dates are: Mon. Jun. 17 at 9pm, Tues. July 16 at 9pm, Thurs. Aug. 15 at 9pm, Sat. Sept. 14 at 8pm. Advance tickets are required. You may [order tickets online](#) or in person (cash only sales) at the St. Catharines Downtown Association office, 80 King Street, main floor, St. Catharines, during office hours Monday to Friday 9:00am to 4:00pm. For more information please phone (905) 685-8424 or email scda@mydowntown.ca.

Ghost Tours of Fort George in Niagara-On-The-Lake is a candlelit experience that takes place Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays throughout July and August at 8:30pm. You can also arrange private Ghost Tours of the haunted Fort George! For more information visit [Ghost Tours of Fort George](#) or phone (905) 468-6621.

Yet another option is **Ghost Tours of Old Fort Erie** taking place only on Fridays during the summer months. While you're in Fort Erie visit the **Fort Erie Historical Museum**. The Historical Museum is in the former Bertie Township Hall located at 402 Ridge Road in Ridgeway, built in 1874 and housing a number of permanent and changing exhibitions. Don't forget the **Fort Erie Railway Museum**. The border city of Fort

Erie has a rich railway history and had one of the largest rail yards in Canada. The

museum includes a Canadian-built 6218



Steam Engine currently under restoration and the Grand Trunk Station, a fine example of Gothic Revival architecture. The Railway Museum is located on 400 Central Ave in Fort Erie. More information is available by phoning (905) 894-5322.

Visit the John Brown homestead, the oldest home in St. Catharines, a two-story stone house built in 1802 and incorporating an earlier 1-1/2 story house (ca. 1796). Space is limited while preservation work is underway, so private tours require a reservation and must be scheduled in advance. According to their website, the Brown Homestead is slated going to be part of a new documentary series featuring many of Niagara's hidden historic gems. Contact them at (905) 328-1646 between 8am and 4pm, Monday to Friday, or [schedule your visit online](#).

Note: This listing of upcoming events is provided as a convenience by the HSSC. The HSSC does not maintain or control these events. Please confirm the event dates and times with the event organizers.