



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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May 2020 Newsletter

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VICTORIA DAY



Queen Victoria's birthday has been celebrated in Canada since May 24th was first declared a holiday by the Legislature of the Province of Canada in 1845.

Born in Kensington Palace on May 24, 1819, Alexandrina Victoria was named after her godfather, Tsar Alexander I, but she preferred her second name. In 1897, Canada issued their first commemorative stamps to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the reign of Queen Victoria. The example on the left depicts two portraits of the Queen: on the occasion of her accession in 1837 and on the occasion of her Diamond Jubilee in 1897. The Victorian Era 1837 – 1901 is associated

with the dominant years of the British Empire, industrial expansion and economic progress. It was during this time that Canada developed as a sovereign state, first with the Union of Upper and Lower Canada in 1841 followed by the confederation of remaining British colonies in North America beginning in 1867. The development of a prosperous St. Catharines parallels this period of social and economic growth. Victoria Day is now celebrated on the Monday preceding May 25 and is a distinctly Canadian observance.

PORT DALHOUSIE PASSENGER STEAMERS

Third in a series describing steamships servicing the early Port Dalhousie passenger trade, by Roger Bradshaw



LINCOLN – Built 1888 – Port Dalhousie Route 1899–1900 – Destroyed by Fire 1920

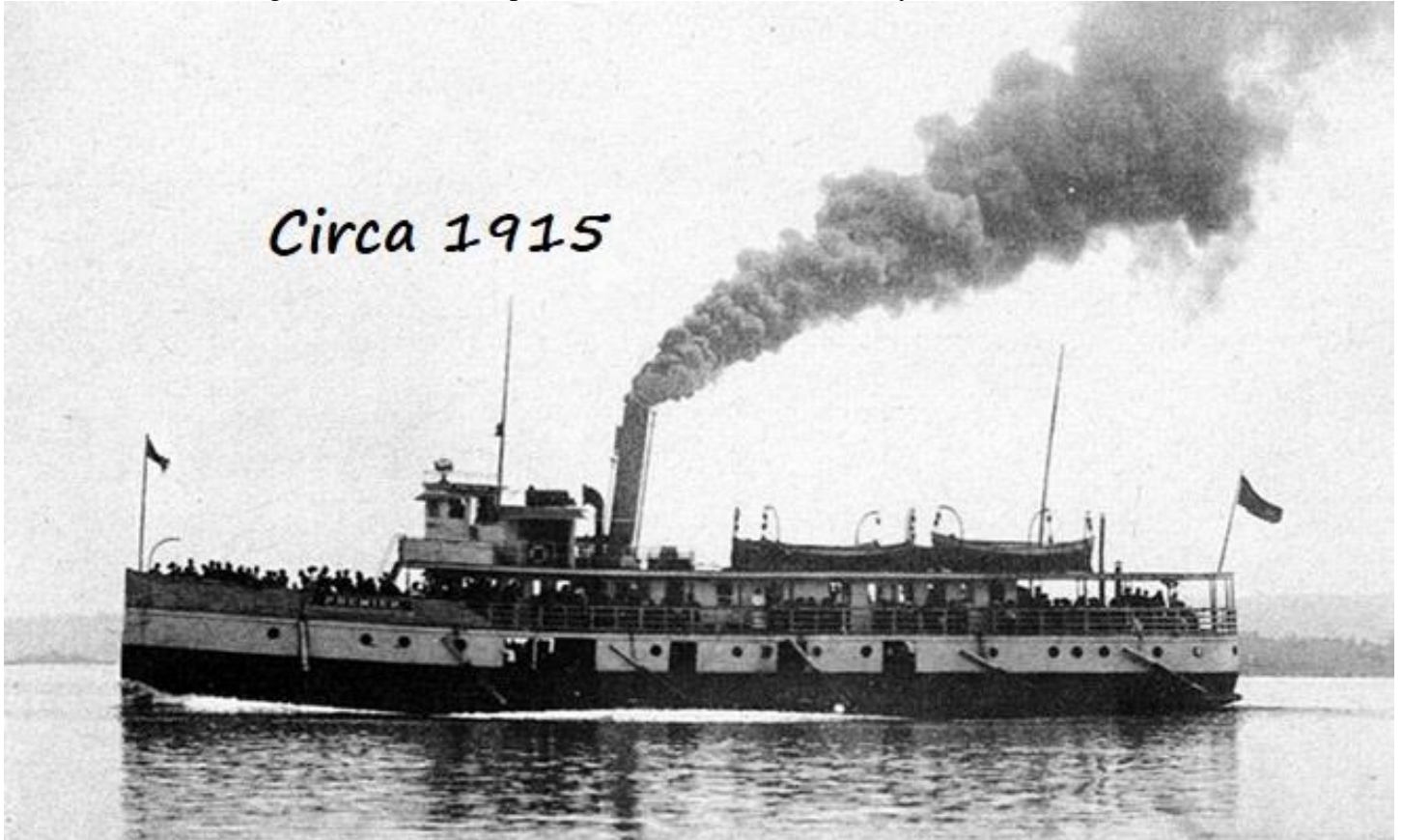
In 1888, a wooden-hulled propeller, double-decked vessel was built at Hamilton. She was 130 feet in length, 25.2 feet in the beam and 9.0 feet in depth. She was christened GREYHOUND. She mainly ran from Toronto westwards up Lake Ontario to Lorne Park and Oakville. On certain occasions, she even crossed the lake to make calls at Grimsby and Port Dalhousie.

In 1898, GREYHOUND was sold and taken to St. Catharines and there she was rebuilt and enlarged over the winter of 1898-99. She was renamed LINCOLN in honour of the county in which St. Catharines and much of the Niagara Peninsula is located.

For the seasons of 1899 and 1900, Lincoln was used along with LAKESIDE on the Toronto – Port Dalhousie run. It was early 1899 that EMPRESS OF INDIA had been sent to Picton for a rebuild. LINCOLN was chartered, for LAKESIDE could not possibly have handled the traffic on the busy Port Dalhousie route herself.

In 1901, with the cross-lake service attracting more patronage, GARDEN CITY was brought back to Lake Ontario to run with LAKESIDE, and LINCOLN was sent to Lake Erie. She may have operated briefly on the Buffalo – Crystal Beach route, but she was soon chartered out for the Buffalo – Chippawa route. For the 1902 season, she operated on a route between the Sault and Thessalon, a small port located on the northern shore of the North Channel of Lake Huron. In 1903, LINCOLN was placed on the ferry service between the Canadian mainland on the northern shore of Lake Erie and Pelee Island. On March 9, 1904, she was holed by ice and sank at her dock in 40 feet of water. Raised without undue delay, LINCOLN was repaired and was ready to resume service at the opening of navigation.

On April 6, 1905 she was severely damaged by fire at her dock at Sandwich (Windsor). LINCOLN was rebuilt over the winter of 1905-06 at Collingwood. She was then renamed PREMIER and placed back on her old Pelee Island service. In August 1906, she was placed back to the Buffalo – Crystal Beach route.



In August 1909, PREMIER was sold to the St. Joe Island and Soo Line for service between the Sault and St. Joseph Island, which is located in Canadian waters.

On November 13, 1920, the 32-year-old PREMIER was totally destroyed by fire whilst lying at Bruce Mines on the North Channel of Lake Huron.

HISTORY QUOTE

“History is not everything, but it is a starting point. History is a clock that people use to tell their political and cultural time of day. It is a compass they use to find themselves on the map of human geography. It tells them where they are but, more importantly, what they must be.”

- African-American historian, author, professor and journalist **Dr. John Henrik Clarke**, 1915 - 1998

175 INTERESTING THINGS TO SEE IN ST. CATHARINES

A series describing local historical sites, by Bill Stevens

WELLAND CANALS TRAIL - GEORGE NICHOLSON TRAIL SECTION



The Welland Canals Trail runs from Lake Ontario to Lake Erie alongside the Welland Canal and constitutes part of the Greater Niagara Circle Route. The City of St. Catharines in partnership with the Regional Municipality of Niagara and with the approval of the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority extended the trail along the East Port Weller (Welland Canal) Spit in north St. Catharines. This walkway extension out into Lake Ontario provides open green spaces separated from vehicular traffic and is considered a valuable recreational facility offering a unique opportunity for both cyclists and pedestrians to enjoy the waterway features and the historical significance and cultural heritage of the spit. There is a small parking lot at Jones Beach and the walk from there to the end of the spit and back will take most of us an hour or more. There is a lookout at the extreme easterly end of the spit. The views back to the shoreline and across and around the lake are spectacular.

George Nicholson was a dedicated cyclist who worked tirelessly to create the Greater Niagara Circle Route as a Niagara Regional planner. He helped map out and negotiate all 150 kilometers of the Greater Niagara Circle Route. George was also a member of the Historical Society of St. Catharines when he passed away suddenly just days after his retirement party in November 2008. On Thursday, July 2, 2009 his wife accepted, in his honour, a rare lifetime achievement award from the Ontario Trails Council, being only the second recipient of the award at the time. George did not live to see the finishing touches to the spit portion that he had been devoted to seeing completed prior to his retirement. Shortly after being completed the City of St. Catharines named the section in his honour the George Nicholson Trail Section.





The Port Weller spits extend well out into Lake Ontario and were constructed between 1913 and 1932 (except for the war years when construction was paused) as part of the overall Fourth Welland Canal project. Rock and earth from the Canal excavation across the Niagara Peninsula was loaded onto rail cars which travelled the

length of the canal construction and their loads dumped into the lake to extend the length of the spit. Along the trail path you can see various soils and rock types indicative of the changing geological characteristics along the Canal route. The soon to be published book *Triumph and Tragedy: The Welland Ship Canal* will profile each worker who was accidentally killed during the Canal construction. The book will also contain photographs and details of the spits' construction.



Just before the east side trail turns easterly towards the lockout if you look across the harbour to the west side spit you will see the Port Weller Search and Rescue Station for the Canadian Coast Guard. Even without binoculars, which I recommend, there is a good view of the station and the Port Weller lighthouse. The site

contains two former lighthouse keeper's dwellings built in 1931 and 1953 and the 1949 former foghorn building which is integral to the Port Weller lighthouse station. The foghorn building is a small, square building built of concrete with a parapet roof, stylized flattened neoclassical detailing, and a raised concrete entablature. A concrete tower on the roof acts as a pedestal for the steel frame of the pier head light and foghorn. The 1953 dwelling and the 1949 foghorn building were both declared Recognized Federal Heritage Buildings in 1989 because of their historical associations, and their architectural and environmental values. The designation is confined to the footprint of the buildings.

photo credits: George on his bike, family of George Nicholson; sign, Bill Stevens; coast guard station, Dennis Gannon; spits, Detroit News August 16, 1930

FINGERS OF FATE: Ralph Sketch, Equestrian Sculptor

by Elizabeth Barss Finnie



One of our favourite Sunday excursions is to Queenston, Ontario, where we often stop by the narrow stretch of park near the Mackenzie Printery. Here, in a glass case, a small-scale sculpture of General Brock's riderless horse Alfred can be seen, in the spot where Brock once tethered him, and where he has been immortalized by the late sculptor, Ralph Sketch. This statue was donated to the Niagara Parks Commission by Mr. and Mrs. Stewart Bennett.

Up the hill, at the Queenston Heights restaurant, one can find another small sculpture by Sketch: a memorial to Major-General Roger Sheaffe.



At the Niagara Historical Museum resides a statue of General Brock galloping at full speed along the Niagara River. A fourth sculpture by Sketch of a local hero is his bronze of Laura Secord leading her cow, and this is apparently housed at the Laura Secord Company headquarters.

So, who was Ralph Sketch?

In the late 1980s, my parents retired from Niagara to Victoria, B.C. Fascinated with their new surroundings, they spent many enjoyable times exploring the coast and nearby Gulf Islands, often by sailboat and sometimes on foot.

One day, while meandering along a back road on Pender Island, they met an older gentleman walking toward them. They stopped to exchange greetings. On hearing that my parents were recent arrivals from Niagara, the man began to tell them his story. That man was Ralph Sketch.

After making Mr. Sketch's acquaintance, my parents stayed in touch with him for several years through mutual friends. This is his story, as told to them, but mostly as recounted in his 1986 book *Equestrian Sculpture*.

Ralph Sketch's colourful life was shaped by fate. He was born in a tent in 1910 on the pampas of Argentina. His father was an English engineer employed to survey the surrounding land for a new railroad. His mother was the daughter of a Scottish landlady in Buenos Aires. His early years were carefree: he and his friends ran wild, riding ponies in cattle round-ups, thus developing his lifelong love of horses. Any formal education barely existed for him in those happy-go-lucky days.

Shortly before his ninth birthday though, young Ralph was sent far from home to a private boarding school called St. George's, outside Buenos Aires. His time there was miserable but short-lived. In 1921 his father went to Cuba to become chief engineer for another railroad company. Ralph was sent off by ship to England where he was to board at his father's old school, and his experiences there by his account were not much happier than the Argentinian ones. Soon after arriving in London, however, Ralph had the good fortune of meeting Capt. Adrian Jones, an old friend of his parents, but more importantly a great equestrian sculptor. Ralph's mother arranged for her son to take a welcome break from school on Saturday afternoons to watch Jones at work in his studio.

By 1927, Ralph managed to graduate from his British school and entered McGill University in Montreal, where he developed an interest in biology and comparative anatomy. He honed his ability to draw muscles and skeletons, both human and animal. He would often spend weekends at the homes of relatives or friends. A fellow houseguest on occasion was Stephen Leacock, then a professor at McGill.

During holidays, Ralph would go by ship to Cuba and travel around by private railroad car, one perk of his father's position. One summer, he worked on the farm of Hugh Wilson who trained champion show horses in Oakville Ontario, which at that time was still a small, semi-rural community.

But in 1929 and 1930 everyone's fortunes changed, as the effects of the Depression spread. Ralph spent the last of his college money travelling by "Colonist Car" - a train car with wooden seats, wooden bunks and a coal stove - across Canada to Banff and Lake Louise, where he worked briefly as a guide on packhorse rides. Here, he fell in love with the Canadian West.

In 1931, Ralph graduated from university and his father lost his job and most of his savings. Through family connections, Ralph landed a job with an insurance company in Montreal. Then an appendix attack changed his luck: he was to recuperate by crossing the Atlantic on the *Empress of Britain* with his wealthy uncle Ralph Y. Sketch, who then sent him on to New Zealand by a long, circuitous, yet thoroughly enjoyable ocean route. Ralph spent several years in New Zealand as an insurance trouble-shooter, dealing, according to him, with all kinds of local corruption. During that time he married a young Canadian woman, Mary Paterson, and they had a baby daughter.

By 1940, World War II was well under way. Ralph joined the Canadian army and survived five and a half years in England and France. He says little in his autobiography about his experiences during that time, but one event made its way into the Canadian newspapers: in Normandy in 1944, Sketch was commander of Item

Troop, 100th Battery, Royal Canadian Artillery. Following a hard fought battle, the Germans were routed, leaving behind their horses. Sketch “liberated” one of these horses, which he named Lady Item. Unbeknownst to him, General de Gaulle arrived to raise the French flag over the town of Caen. Sketch came galloping upon the scene on his horse, drew up abruptly in surprise, and saluted. A photograph of this incident was picked up by the press. Capt. Sketch is clearly seen on horseback in front of the bombed-out buildings of Caen. Many years later, Sketch made a bronze statue based on the event and the photo. This statue, called The Salute, was to be dedicated at a fiftieth year commemoration ceremony in 1994 in Caen with Sketch in attendance, but fate again intervened.

Returning to Canada after the war, he was sent to Toronto by his insurance company employers and was able to buy some property in Oakville, where he hoped to keep horses. His son Michael was born, but Sketch’s marriage and health foundered. His doctor recommended sculpting as a diversion. His first effort, a bronze sand-casting of a hackney stallion, shows remarkable talent. He bought a horse and pony, and he and his son would ride across the fields around Oakville in the early mornings. At night he worked on sculptures in his attic. There he produced his statue of General Brock urging on his horse.

With his marriage and career at an end, Sketch and his son moved to Caledon, Ontario, where he joined the hunt club and bred hunters on his farm. He married journalist Marian Ogden, and shortly thereafter fathered two more sons. He and Marian put up their farm for sale and moved in 1967 to a large acreage on North Pender Island, B.C., building a house, stable and studio from local rock and cedar. Here he began his new life as a sculptor. Sales of small equestrian statues did well, and soon he turned to Canadian history, creating such historic figures as Montcalm, Alexander Mackenzie, Simon Fraser and Laura Secord, frequently working on commissions from governments or corporations. In his book *Equestrian Sculpture* Sketch describes in detail his methods of creating bronzes, which were mostly done in one-third life scale.

But then: in a most tragic twist of fate, on a night in September 1993, Ralph Sketch and his wife Marian died in a fire in their home on Pender Island. Their grave markers in the local cemetery are ironically simple, for a sculptor and his wife.

In February 1994, his statue The Salute was flown to France on a Canadian Armed Forces aircraft, in time for the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Caen. One hopes that the spirit of Ralph Sketch went with it.

Here are some last thoughts, as they appear on Ralph Sketch’s headstone:

If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds’ worth of distance run. Kipling.

LECTURE PROGRAM

Cancelled.

The Society Board regret to announce that all HSSC Lecture Programming at the St. Catharines Museum & Welland Canals Centre has been cancelled until further notice, respecting restrictions on social gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic. A new Lecture Program will be developed and we look forward to returning to a live presentation format when it is safe to do so.

HSSC NEWSLETTER CHALLENGE

The HSSC Newsletter challenge, open to our HSSC members in good standing, is to memorize this poem “If” for dramatic recital at a future monthly meeting of our members. Your incentive is a free HSSC membership for the subsequent year! Recitations will be judged by the attending members at that meeting. Good Luck.

According to the previous article in this issue, ‘Fingers of Fate’, the inscription on Ralph Sketch’s headstone is an excerpt from the poem “If” by Rudyard Kipling. You may recall this from your school days. While the poem was written over a century ago, the words remain inspirational today and are reprinted here for your consideration as we all go through these challenging times.



Rudyard Kipling, 1865 - 1936, was an English writer and Nobel Laureate. He gained a reputation as Poet of the Empire during the Victorian era.

“If” is arguably Kipling’s most famous poem, written in 1895 and published in 1910 in a collection of his poems and stories.

IF

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don’t deal in lies,
Or being hated, don’t give way to hating,
And yet don’t look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you’ve spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build ’em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: ‘Hold on!’

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds’ worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it,
And which is more—you’ll be a Man, my son!

- Rudyard Kipling

HISTORY ONLINE

In the past, this newsletter has offered suggestions and recommendations for attending area Museums and Historical Sites over the summer months. Unfortunately, many of these activities are currently closed to the public and summer events have been cancelled, as we find ourselves in the midst of this pandemic.

History buffs – fear not! With access to a computer and the Internet you can search online resources that specialize in local St. Catharines and Niagara area history and beyond:

- **Brock University Archives & Special Collections** has a unique rare and valuable collection focusing on the Niagara area. <https://dr.library.brocku.ca/handle/10464/5> The Map Library at Brock is also a must-see for those who are interested in historical maps and aerial photos of the area and more. <https://brocku.ca/library/collections/mdg/maps-geodata/>
- **St. Catharines Public Library Digital Collections** has an abundance of information for your research <http://www.stcatharines.library.on.ca/index.php/digital-collections>
- **St. Catharines Museum & Welland Canals Centre Online Collections** is a vast resource related to the history of St. Catharines. <https://museum-cityofstcatharines.msaproxy.net/>
- **Museum Chat Live!** Offers a number of categories and includes audio podcasts, such as a series on Canal Crossings (the bridges of the Welland Canal), organizing and preserving your family history and artifacts, as well as many other topics. <https://stcatharinesmuseumblog.com/category/podcasts/museum-chat-live/>
- **History Pin** is an online map that connects communities with local history, where people share photos and stories telling the histories of their local communities, located as a ‘pin’ on a map. One of the contributors to this collection is the St. Catharines Museum. <https://www.historypin.org/en/person/90302>
- **Facebook** public groups, such as [Vintage St. Catharines](#) and [Vintage Port Dalhousie](#) offer a place for people to share images and their personal recollections of local history.
- **Niagara On The Lake Museum** is closed for visits, but offers online access to their Collections Database with resources available through the Niagara On The Lake Public Library. <http://www.nhsm.ca/>

END OF THE SEASON 2019-2020

This is the final edition of the Historical Society of St. Catharines newsletter for the 2019 – 2020 season. We’re looking forward to a summer hiatus and returning with the new season that starts in September 2020. On behalf of the 2019-2020 Historical Society of St. Catharines Board, thank you for your continued support. Be safe.

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