



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.

Website: <http://stcatharineshistory.wordpress.com> Newsletter editor: John Brenton, hssc.newsletter@gmail.com

September 2020 Newsletter

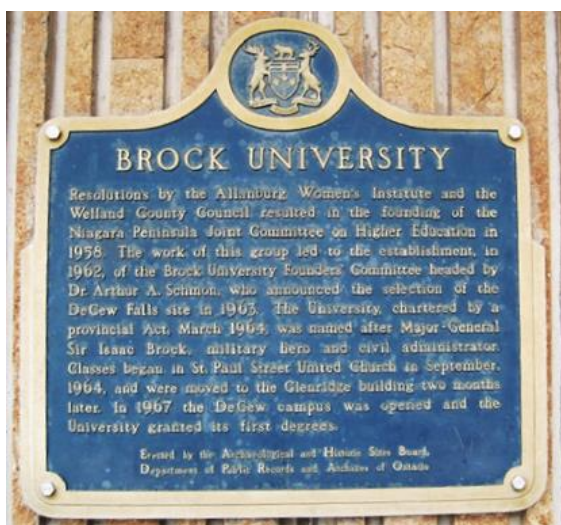
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175 INTERESTING THINGS TO SEE IN ST. CATHARINES

A series describing local historical sites, by Bill Stevens

There are several interesting things located on the campus of Brock University which relate to Major-General Sir Isaac Brock. This column will highlight four of them.



Historical Plaque

The plaque inscription reads as follows: **“BROCK UNIVERSITY - Resolutions by the Allanburg Women's Institute and the Welland County Council resulted in the founding of the Niagara Peninsula Joint Committee on Higher Education in 1958. The work of this group led to the establishment, in 1962, of the Brock University Founders' Committee headed by Dr. Arthur A. Schmon, who announced the selection of the DeCew Falls site in 1963. The University, chartered by a provincial Act, March 1964, was named after Major-General Sir Isaac Brock, military hero and civil administrator. Classes began in St. Paul Street United Church in September 1964, and were moved to the Glenridge building two months later. In 1967 the DeCew campus was opened and the**

University granted its first degrees” - Erected by the Archaeological and Historic Sites Board, Department of Public Records and Archives of Ontario” (note: St. Paul Street United Church is now known as Silver Spire United Church)



Statue

This wonderful statue of Major-General Sir Isaac Brock was unveiled on May 16, 2015.

Piece of Former Homestead

Located in the main foyer of the Walker Complex is a block of Guernsey granite taken from the house on High Street, St. Peter Port, Island of Guernsey, where Major-General Sir Isaac Brock lived as a boy. It was a gift by the State of Deliberation of the Bailiwick of Guernsey and unveiled by Sir William Arnold and Lady Arnold in the presence of Governor General Michener.



Queenston Heights Monument Piece

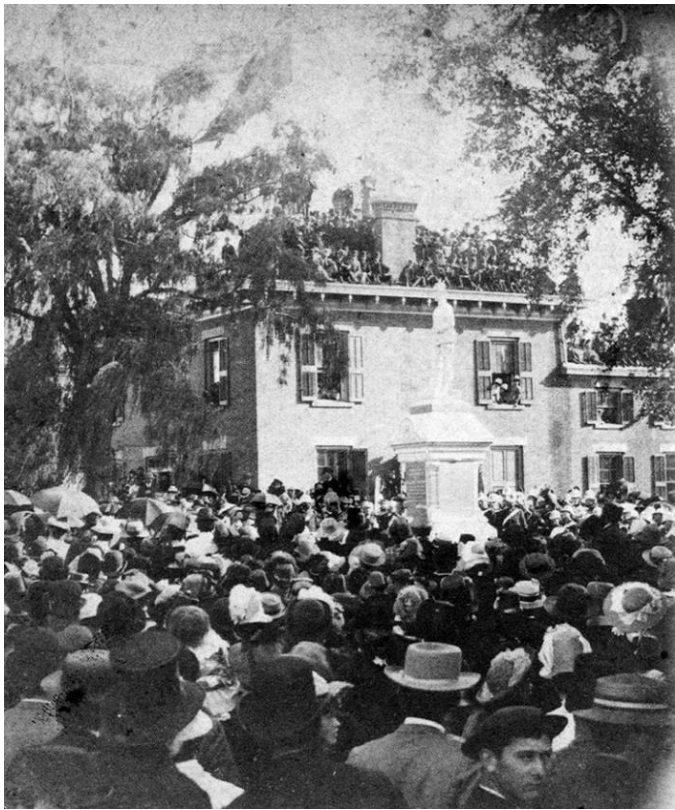
On April 5, 1929 a lightning strike caused pieces of Brock's monument at Queenston Heights to break off and fall to the ground. An inspection of the monument was undertaken and a report was presented to the Niagara Parks Commission in 1930. The report indicated that the statue was in need of repair. Subsequently the entire statue from the waist up was removed. The torso and both arms were rebuilt from scratch and the head repaired. The removed pieces were stored at the base of the monument. On a Thursday night in 1966 a group of Brock University students brought the left shoulder piece of Major-General Sir Isaac Brock to the then campus of Brock University on Glenridge Avenue at Lockhart Drive. Brock University President James A. Gibson had the piece returned to the Niagara Parks Commission. In 1973 the Niagara Parks Commission donated the piece to Brock as part of Brock's recognition of all the groups and individuals that helped raise \$8,500,000 for the University Founding Club. A plaque marking the occasion was mounted on the stone and unveiled by C. Bruce Hill, general chair of the fund. The accompanying photo is when the piece was located in Jubilee Court where it was weathering badly. It is currently being stored in the Campus Central Utilities Building until a suitable indoor place is determined.



My thanks to David Sharon for contributing an article from *The Brock News* issue of Friday, April 8, 2011 and also finding the current location of the piece.

THE STATUE ERECTED TO THE MEMORY OF PRIVATE ALEXANDER WATSON

A memorial statue dedicated to a local volunteer of the Canadian Militia stands on the lawn of St. Catharines City Hall at the corner of Church and James Streets. In 1886, a citizens committee raised funds and had the monument built by James Munro's Marble and Granite Works of St. Catharines. The statue was unveiled by



Unveiling of Watson Statue, September 14, 1886

Major General Frederick D. Middleton in a well-attended ceremony as seen in the photo (left). It was reportedly “the largest crowd ever seen in one city”. Middleton was the commander of the Canadian Militia and led the expedition during the North-West Rebellion.

The main plaque announces it was “**Erected to the memory of Private Alexander Watson, 90th Winnipeg Batt. Rifles, Canadian Volunteers and his companions in arms who fell in battle during the rebellion in the N.W.T. A.D. 1885**”. A quote in Latin that was commonly used on war memorials and monuments of the era reflects the prevailing mood of patriotism and service to Country:

“**Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori**”.

“It is sweet and fitting to die for the fatherland”.

Two plaques on the sides of the base list members of Boulton's Scouts (Boulton's Mounted Infantry) who were also killed in service in the North-West Rebellion, as well as the names of four local soldiers killed in the Second Boer War. The Watson memorial would remain the centre of Remembrance Day services and military reunions at City Hall until Cenotaphs were built in the 1920's to honour soldiers of the Great War. It is a

significant historic artifact listed on the Canadian Military Memorials database as memorial number 35080-021.

The years have not been kind to Private Watson's memorial. It was partially reconstructed in the 1970's. The soft white marble sides of the base were weathered, so they were removed and bronze plaques replaced the original inscriptions. The entire base was sprayed with plasticized 'stucco'. In 2009, a study of the City's outdoor assets and artwork deemed the Watson memorial to have urgent deterioration issues. Restoration or removal? At that time, City Council deferred the decision.

Today, the North-West Rebellion is considered a dark chapter of Canada's history. This is where we need enlightenment. In July of 2020 an online petition was presented to St. Catharines City Council, calling for the removal of the statue. City Council discussed the issue and voted unanimously to develop a relocation plan for the statue, with consultation of several organizations, including the Historical Society of St. Catharines. Preserving the statue and its history provides an opportunity to educate, to deliver balanced historical context that will benefit future generations.



A BROAD, CONSULTATIVE APPROACH

The City of St. Catharines will develop a relocation plan for the memorial and have issued a News Release dated July 28, 2020, that said in part:

The City will take a broad, consultative approach, in determining the details of relocation for a monument that has stood in front of City Hall for over 134 years. On Monday evening City Council voted unanimously to consult several organizations in the development of a relocation plan for the statue of Pte. Alexander Watson that currently stands in front of City Hall. Organizations to be consulted ahead of development of a relocation plan include:

Heritage Advisory Committee	Métis National Council	Niagara Métis Council
Public Art Advisory Committee	Niagara Regional Native Centre	St. Catharines MP Chris Bittle
Royal Canadian Legion Branch 24	The Historical Society of St. Catharines	St. Catharines MPP Jennie Stevens
Lincoln and Welland Regiment Association	The National Inventory of Canadian Military Monuments and Veterans' Affairs	
Anti-Racism Advisory Committee	Descendants of the Watson family	

The full text of the Press Release can be found on the City Website:

https://www.stcatharines.ca/en/news/index.aspx?_mid=9915&page=3&newsId=f4cdc6d1-19a2-4fa5-933a-b2b049b2a8c4

This is the text of the letter from HSSC to Mayor and City Councillors, dated September 7, 2020:

Dear Sirs/Madams

Re: Statue of Private Alexander Watson

I am the President of the Historical Society of St. Catharines. The Historical Society of St. Catharines was founded in 1927 and maintains its mission to increase the knowledge and appreciation of the history of St. Catharines.

We understand that St. Catharines City Council has decided to consult with different stakeholders, including the Historical Society of St. Catharines, on the future of the Watson statue. The Executive of the Historical Society has met to discuss this issue. We appreciate and respect the different views and perspectives on the future of this monument. After some lengthy discussions, we agreed that the Watson statue has significant historical value and should be preserved in some form.

In particular, we note that Brock Professor Russell Johnson was recently quoted in the St. Catharines Standard as saying “the Watson monument...is the first erected to an individual soldier serving in the Canadian military” and that “it has strong educative value...and truth and reconciliation value.” We agree with those statements. We also agreed that it would be helpful to install a new plaque next to the statue (wherever that may be) to provide some balanced historical context on the North-West Rebellion and the different viewpoints surrounding it. We think that this is a balanced approach which succeeds in preserving a unique historical monument that has been in St. Catharines since 1886 while critically assessing the story behind the monument and the values it represented.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dave Willer – President of the Historical Society of St. Catharines

HISTORY QUOTE

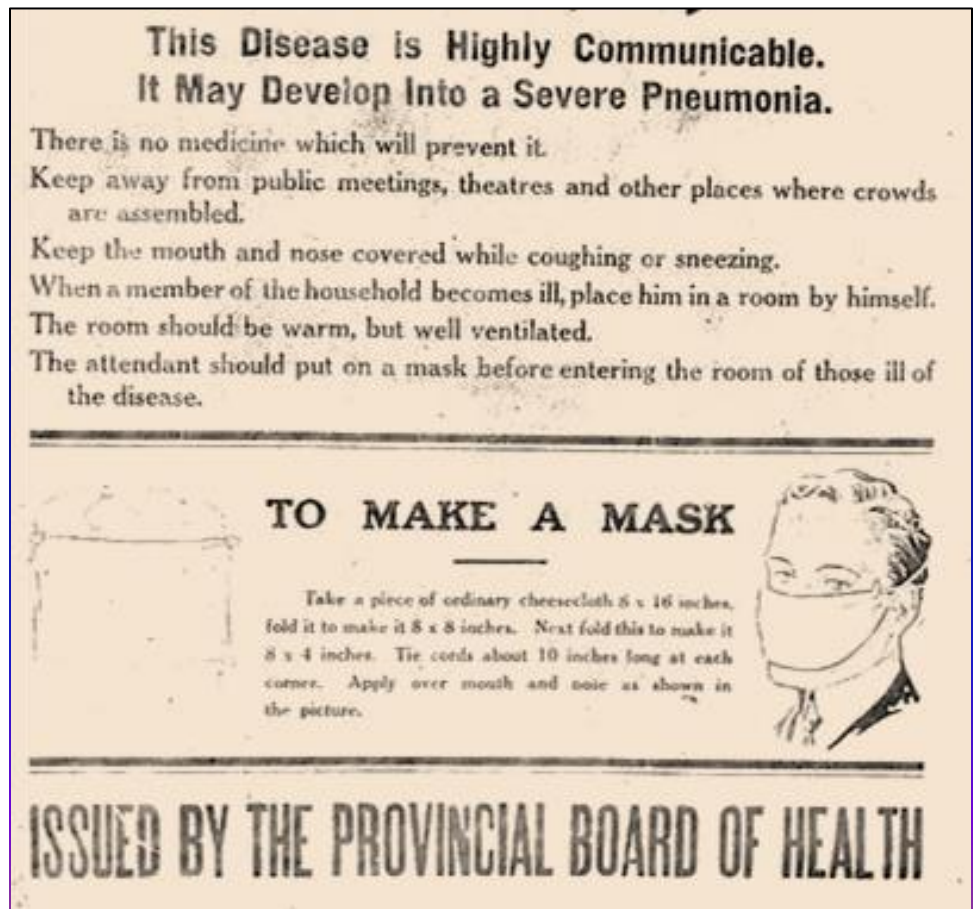
"We must cherish our inheritance. We must preserve our nationality for the youth of our future. The story should be written down to pass on."

- Canadian politician, leader of the Métis people of the Canadian Prairies **Louis Riel**, 1844 – 1885
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THE INFLUENZA PANDEMIC REACHES ST. CATHARINES 1918

By Elizabeth Finnie

By the end of the First World War, the country was exhausted. On Armistice Day, November 11, 1918, the citizens of St. Catharines crowded onto St. Paul St. in celebration and relief. In the background, however, there lurked another enemy. A strange illness was reaching across the world and infiltrating our borders. Without widespread and uncensored news reporting, information was slow to arrive. This respiratory influenza was attacking and killing mainly the young. Doctors had little knowledge to combat it. Probably spread by returning soldiers, the disease appeared at the military camps in Niagara in September, 1918. Debates raged over the wearing of masks and the closing of movie theatres, businesses and schools. St. Catharines' only hospital became overcrowded, forcing people to ride out the disease at home. A few isolation hospitals sprang up, such as one on the top floor of the Welland House. Medical workers were becoming ill and the Mack School of Nursing graduated its students early to aid in the battle. Two well-known local nurses were Bessie Dwyer and "Miss Burgoyne".



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Ten days after Armistice Day, authorities reported about 1000 instances of influenza in the city, and 61 deaths. It became apparent that quarantining was helpful in stemming the spread, as well as fresh air and masks. Mr. Eugene Dwyer's diary recorded several cases of influenza, including that of his own son, Leslie. On January 1, 1919, he described the three-week-long ordeal during which Leslie was treated by a specialist from Toronto at a cost of \$100, and was on the road to recovery. By early 1919 the worst of the epidemic was over. St. Catharines had lost a total of 250 lives. Canada had lost about 50,000.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP FOR 2021

Your Historical Society is making every effort to deliver value during these challenging times. Buying a membership continues to support research and projects that align with our mission of increasing knowledge and appreciation of St. Catharines and local area history. HSSC members will receive the newsletter 4 times a year. As much as we look forward to gathering together in our monthly meetings for the presentations, we are looking at creative new ways to produce, record and deliver a monthly lecture series. If you have experience in the area of video production for online presentations, we'd love to hear from you hssc.contact@gmail.com.

Thank you for being a member and supporting the Historical Society of St. Catharines!

Membership dues can be paid at any HSSC Meeting or mail a cheque to:

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

Make cheques payable to: The Historical Society of St. Catharines

- **Individual Membership: \$15**
- **Family Membership \$20**

Your membership information will not be shared with any other group or business. To receive your newsletter by email we ask that you provide your e-mail address on the membership form.

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Postal Code: _____ Telephone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

- ☐ I would like to receive the Society Newsletter, meeting reminders and notices by e-mail
- ☐ I would like to receive the Society Newsletter by print