

The Historical Society of St. Catharines

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

Our mission and goal: 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.

Our website is: <http://stcatharineshistory.wordpress.com>

December 2011 Newsletter

UPCOMING HSSC PROGRAMMES

Our monthly meetings for all members and their guests are held at the St. Catharines Museum, Lock 3. Doors open at 7:00 p.m. The museum is also open at that time so that members and guests may view current exhibits. The Society meeting starts at 7:30 sharp. Reminder: as our members are inside the Burgoyne Room and unable to monitor those entering the Museum, the Museum's door will be locked at approximately 7:45 p.m. If you are late, please ring the doorbell to the right of the main doors.

Thursday, January 26, 2012

7:30 p.m. - Lecture: David Hemmings will bring John McFarland to life in his lecture titled: "The House of John McFarland, Niagara's Timber Trader." The lecture covers shipbuilding, boat repairs, prisoners in 2 wars, Fort Niagara, 2800 acres of timbered land, farms in Niagara and Thorold/Port Robinson, tea trading, his family, Keefer Mansion and various other houses and of course the newly refurbished McFarland House on the Niagara Parkway.

Thursday, February 23, 2012

7:30 p.m. - Lecture: Brian Narhi will present a unique lecture using actual diaries of two local black families, Talbot and Mills, to tell their story. This program coincides with February being Black History month.

Thursday, March 22, 2012

7:30 p.m. - Lecture: Janis Barlow will share with us her collection of information on the Kiwanis Horse Show, this once famous horse show that will surely bring back memories to those who once attended this event.

Thursday, April 26, 2012

7:30 p.m. - ANNUAL Meeting - presentation of annual reports and elections. (note: elections this year will be for up to 6 Directors only as the executive positions do not expire until 2013. If any member is interested in standing for a directorship, please advise any executive member).

8:00 p.m. (estimate) - Lecture: Alun Hughes - his lectures are always well attended and very "animated". Stay tuned for the title!

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

SOCIETY NEWS

Memberships:

Our membership year is from September 1st to August 31st.

Annual Membership dues are: Individuals \$10.00 and Family \$15.00

Paid up members will receive a blue membership card. Members who have not renewed will not receive the next newsletter. (note: Families receive only one newsletter).

New Members:

We welcome John and Susan Suk, Dave Willer, Marilyn Hardsand (UE), Mike Brandon, Wesley Kline, Craig and Sue Tallman, and Peter Voulgaridis.

September 22, 2011 General Meeting Report

Fifty- nine members and guests showed up for our first meeting of the 2011 – 2012 season. Society president Elizabeth Finnie gave greetings and announcements, inviting members to pick up their September newsletters and membership cards at the door. She especially thanked Bill Stevens for his work on the recent mail out, assistance with the newsletter and much more. She also thanked John Calvert for his work on the past year's newsletters. Paul Lewis reported on the Society's recent publication: *Duelling Columns*, as well as his own book, *The History and Homes of Yates Street, St. Catharines*, which was just released the previous day. Elizabeth then introduced our guest speaker, **Anne McPherson**, who gave a lively and entertaining presentation on her local families: the McCordicks, Smiths, Simsons and Walkers. Anne had brought many fascinating old photographs, a family tree, and other memorabilia which the audience was able to examine after her presentation. Many of our members had their own recollections of the families and the McCordick tannery. Past president John Burtiak thanked our speaker. We then regrouped for some 'social' time with opportunities to purchase or win books, examine the artefacts Anne had displayed, and enjoy refreshments provided as usual by Lorraine and Bill Steinman.

October 27, 2011 General Meeting Report

To begin the War of 1812 bicentennial commemorations, past president **Dr. Wesley B. Turner** was our special guest, speaking on his recent book *The Astonishing General, the life and legacy of Sir Isaac Brock*. Ninety members and guests were present (perhaps a record!). Wes was introduced by Brenda Zadoroznij and thanked by John Burtiak. There were many questions and comments from our attentive audience. Several members of the Royal Niagara Military Institute attended, and we were also pleased to see several students. (NB if you know of any interested young people, please encourage them to come out to our meetings.)

Heritage Organization Grant Received:

The Society received a Heritage Organization grant in the amount of \$ 943. We thank the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Culture for this valuable assistance to our programmes.

NEWSLETTER NOTES

The Historical Society of St. Catharines Newsletter is published up to 4 times per year. The purpose is to inform the membership of issues pertaining to the Society and items of historical interest. Comments and queries should be directed to the Society's postal address. Opinions and comments expressed in the Newsletter are of the writers and do not necessarily reflect those of the Society. Subscription to the Newsletter is by paid membership only.

Submission Deadline for March 2012 Newsletter is February 1, 2012

OUR PAST PRESIDENT: Sheila M. WILSON

By Elizabeth Finnie

Sheila Wilson has never owned a camera. The almost-91-year-old former librarian has lived and traveled all over the world but keeps most of her memories inside her head. On a rainy afternoon recently we lingered over tea and cookies while Sheila told stories from her long and varied career.

Sheila Moraig Chapman was born in January, 1921 in Dunfermline, Scotland, a city near Edinburgh famous as the birthplace of such notables as Charles I, James VI, Andrew Carnegie, several rock stars and rugby players, and one John Norton, of whom a whole other story could be told.

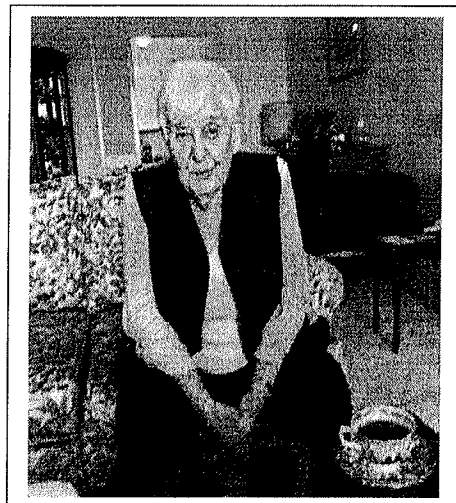
In 1926 Sheila moved to Toronto with her parents, but returned to Scotland in 1932 to live with her grandparents. Soon after the war broke out she joined the Women's Royal Naval Service (the 'Wrens') in May 1940. After training in Scotland she was stationed in Liverpool and Grimsby, England, then on to Algiers and finally Naples. She has many stories of her life at this time. As she related in a December 1984 Standard article, she "drew navigational charts and gave out directions for convoys on how to avoid minefields". Sheila served with the Wrens until September 1946.

After the war she came to Port Dalhousie to rejoin her mother after an absence of twelve years. She began studying nursing at McMaster University but before long, switched to literature. She then did a library degree at the University of Toronto and began working as a librarian at Hamilton Public Library. By 1952, however, Sheila met and married Mackay (Mac) Wilson, an auditor for H.K. Ferguson Construction. After a wedding trip down the Welland Canal, they moved to such diverse places as Niagara Falls, NY, Cleveland, the Philippines, Williamsburg, VA and Chicago. In 1959 they returned to St. Catharines and Sheila began her long career as a librarian at the St. Catharines Public Library. (note from E.F.: I remember, as a grade school student about that time, being indoctrinated into the mysteries of the Carnegie library by Mrs. Wilson. Little did I know I would work for her in years to come.) Sheila was instrumental in building up the Reference department in the Carnegie library and then the Special Collections department (local history and genealogy) in the St. Catharines Centennial Library from the time it opened in 1977 until her retirement in 1985.

Meanwhile Sheila was involved with the Historical Society of St. Catharines, serving as president from 1983 to 1985 and 1988 to 1989.

Sheila has written two books: *St. Catharines: Canada's canal city* (with John N. Jackson), published by the St. Catharines Standard, 1992, and *Taking the Waters: a history of the spas of St. Catharines*, published by the St. Catharines Historical Society, 1999.

After her retirement Sheila was able to continue her world travels. On a cold and stormy day in January 2011 she and many friends and family celebrated her ninetieth birthday in fine style. Sheila retains an active interest in world affairs as well as local history. Long may this indomitable spirit continue.



ST. CATHARINES AND THE WAR OF 1812 BICENTENNIAL

By Brian Narhi

As this late fall issue of the Society's newsletter goes to press, we're just a matter of months away from the official start of the bicentennial celebrations for the War of 1812. Most (but not all) of the municipalities in the Niagara Region have well-established, volunteer driven committees in place which have been actively planning commemorative events for the past three or four years. There's excitement in the air surrounding the schedule of parades, re-enactments and other activities which will be staged not only here in Niagara, but in other regions across southern and central Ontario. The years 2012-2014 promise to keep us well supplied with pomp, pageantry, good cheer with our American neighbours, and the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to witness events which will someday form another part of the rich historical tapestry of this region. The last major 1812 commemorations took place nearly a century ago, on the eve of the Great War in Europe. The focus of the local commemorations, then as now, was largely centered upon the communities along the Niagara River, although events were also held at Beaver Dams, Grimsby and Stoney Creek.

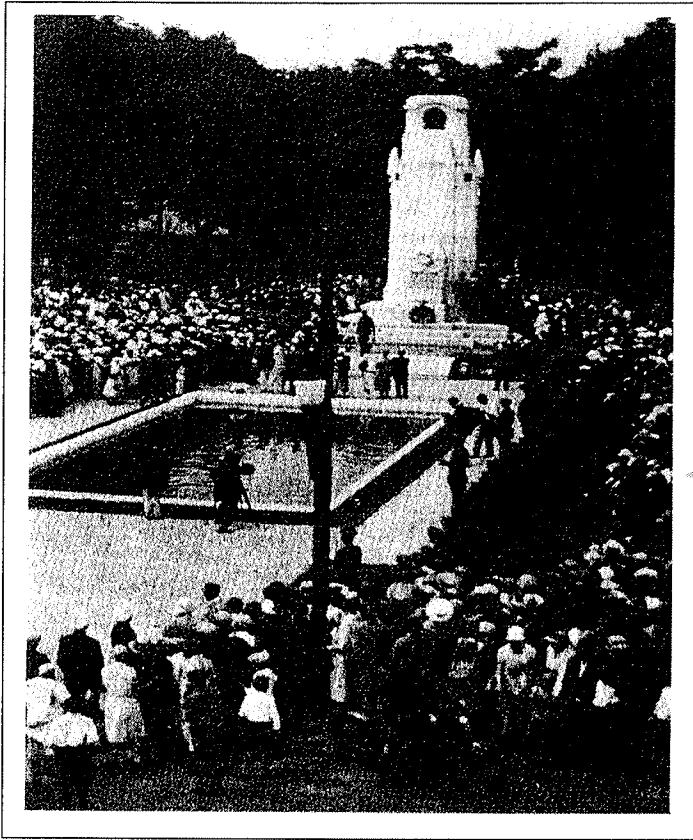
It is certainly true, and it was undoubtedly quite fortuitous, that St. Catharines was not the focal point for any major battles during the war. The fact that the village escaped with relatively little damage in comparison to other settlements along the frontier may have contributed somewhat to its early post-war economic recovery. This was in addition to the greater prosperity which the construction of the First Welland Canal would soon contribute to the nascent village on the banks of the Twelve Mile Creek. We also know, for instance, that during the War and in the two years that followed the conclusion of hostilities, that some of the local courts temporarily sat here. In 1817, the publication of the Niagara Spectator newspaper was transferred from St. Davids to St. Catharines for a period of time.

St. Catharines did nevertheless play a role in the war. Grantham Township supplied men for the Lincoln Militia, and several of them took an active part in the hostilities. There were a number of casualties from among their numbers, and the grave sites of some of these men and veterans who survived the war may still be found in burial places within the city. It is known that British troops and militiamen were stationed at "The Twelve," particularly in 1813. Some advance pickets were stationed at important road junctions---for instance, an outpost was set up in the vicinity of Port Weller School, near the intersection of Niagara Street and Lakeshore Road just to the west of the Ten Mile Creek. The first church in the settlement served as a hospital and sustained some damage as a result. Due to its geographic location, St. Catharines was traversed on a number of occasions by both British and American forces, as well as by their respective native allies, and the local inhabitants suffered from pillaging as a consequence. Last but not least, the iconic Canadian heroine, Laura Secord, passed through the village while on her way to warn Fitzgibbon of the planned American attack at Beaver Dams in June 1813.

The St. Catharines War of 1812 Steering Committee has met regularly since the summer of 2007. A number of modest events have been planned to commemorate the role that our community took during the war. This includes some publications which we hope will form a lasting genealogical and historical record of the events of two centuries ago.

If you would like to get involved and participate in the activities of the steering committee, contact Brian Narhi at (905) 934-1744, or e-mail BrianNarhi@AOL.com.

A REMEMBRANCE DAY TRIPTYCH



On August 7, 1927, the Prince of Wales, later and briefly to be King Edward VIII, came to St. Catharines to dedicate our newly built Cenotaph.

This photograph of the event is courtesy of the St. Catharines Museum (N 5121). Note the reflecting pool and vintage motorcycle in the foreground, and the coach house, still to be seen today, in the background. The pool was removed in 1942 as children were using it as a wading pool and that was thought to be disrespectful and dangerous.

Now, almost 85 years later, the City is fundraising to refurbish the aging Cenotaph and other war memorials in St. Catharines. At the service on November 11, 2011, the Historical Society of St. Catharines was represented by president Elizabeth Finnie who placed a wreath on the steps of the monument in honour of those soldiers and peacekeepers who have fallen.

A Story: When I was a teenager, I asked my Grandfather (my father's father) what he did in the war. I don't ever remember him talking about the war before. I asked him if he killed many German soldiers. He said "yes" but could not guess how many. I asked him if it bothered him. He said not really because that was his job, to kill Germans for England. I asked him what was the worst thing he did in the war. He told me a very descriptive story about being in France. They had been in the trenches for several days up to their knees in mud and water. Finally they moved to a little town which had been bombed repeatedly. That evening they took shelter in an abandoned old mansion of a house. They ripped the wooden baseboards off the wall and the trim from the doors. Anything that would burn to give them heat for the night. Unfortunately the fires in the house got too big and the old house caught fire. Early the next morning as they marched out of town up a hillside, my grandfather kept looking back at the town. Due to the fire they started to keep warm, the whole town caught fire and the entire town burned. I said wasn't it worse to kill German soldiers. He said that was his duty, to kill the enemy. He regretted most burning the town because most of the men from the town had been killed or were fighting in the war. The town was only occupied by women and children and because of his desire for temporary warmth he and his fellow soldiers had destroyed all of the homes and these women and children would have no place to live. That was his great regret.

A Second Story: At the age of eighty, my mother's mother remarried in approximately 1980. She married a German named Paul Ludwig who had been in Canada for a few years. Paul (as we called him) was in the war. At the wedding, everyone from my side of the family attended including my father's father (from the story above). Paul and my grandfather started talking about the war and discovered they had both been on the same battlefield on the same day. They had been trying to kill each other. Now decades later they were at Paul's wedding to my grandmother. Drinking and eating and enjoying each other's company and now they were related by marriage. How the world had changed.....**both stories by John Calvert.**

SOME PROVINCIAL PLAQUES IN ST. CATHARINES

by Bill Stevens

The Founding of St. Catharines

Enterprising settlers widened trails created by aboriginal people to accommodate wagon traffic. By 1798, a crossroads community was formed at the site of St. Catharines. Construction of the Welland Canal some 30 years later stimulated economic development and by mid-century St. Catharines had become a significant milling and shipbuilding centre.

Location: At the municipal building, 50 Church Street, St. Catharines

Lance-Corporal Fred Fisher, V.C. 1894-1915

A native of St. Catharines, Fisher enlisted with the Canadian Expeditionary Force in 1914. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for his exceptional courage and skill in leading his machine gun detachment during the second battle of Ypres in April 1915.

Location: In Memorial Park, St. Paul Street West, St. Catharines

Colonel Graham Thomson Lyall, V.C. 1892-1941

In 1918, Colonel Lyall led his platoon against the enemy at Bourlon Wood and Blécourt, displaying exceptional valour and leadership, inflicting heavy casualties, and capturing 182 prisoners, 26 machine-guns, and one field gun. For his actions, King George V presented Lyall with the Victoria Cross, the British Empire's highest decoration for valour.

Location: In The Lincoln and Welland Regiment memorial garden at the corner of Lake Street and Welland Avenue.

Harriet Ross Tubman c.1820-1913

A renowned conductor on the Underground Railroad, Tubman led hundreds of freedom seekers out of slavery in the southern states. For eight years, she made St Catharines her base of operations.

Location: On the grounds of the British Methodist Episcopal Church, 92 Geneva Street.

Richard Pierpoint c.1774-c.1838

One of the first black settlers in the Niagara region, Pierpoint had been enslaved to a British officer. During the American Revolution, he enlisted in the British forces and thereby gained his freedom. A member of Butler's Rangers, "Captain Dick" settled in the vicinity of present-day St. Catharines after the regiment was disbanded in 1784.

Location: In Centennial Gardens, Oakdale Avenue, near the site where he settled.

The Reverend Anthony Burns 1834-1862

Born a slave in Virginia, Anthony Burns escaped at the age of 20. Arrested, returned to his owner and then sold, he was subsequently ransomed by a Baptist minister from Boston. Burns himself became a minister in the Baptist Church and from 1860 until his death led a congregation in St. Catharines.

Location: At entrance to Victoria Lawn Cemetery, where his grave is located, Queenston Street.

The Mack Centre of Nursing Education

In 1874, Dr. Theophilus Mack established the St. Catharines Training School for Nurses. The school endorsed the Florence Nightingale system of training based on a sound knowledge of hygiene and medicine, and was the first school of its kind in Canada.

Location: At the site of the school, now the Leonard Nurses' Home, 178 Queenston Street.

There are more provincial plaques in St. Catharines. This series to be continued in the next newsletter.

THE HISTORY DETECTIVES and THE PARACHUTING DOG

by Elizabeth Finnie and Dennis Gannon

Last October on a visit to Toronto I (EF) met up with an ‘old’ high school friend from St. Catharines, Ann Braidberg Posen, who is now Chair of the Board of the Textile Museum of Canada. She showed me around a traveling exhibit in the museum featuring the Molas (brightly coloured blouses) of the Kuna Yala islands of Panama. These beautiful blouses are works of art crafted since ancient times in patterns based on everything from Biblical themes to Disney characters. One Mola was a surprise. The caption read: “The dog in the Mola... is a police dog from St. Catharines, Ontario, whose human is shown practicing jumping with her from a biplane. Illustration by Aldo Molinari for the Italian Sunday supplement *Illustrazione del Popolo*.” My friend was sure the date was some time in the 1920s. A parachute jumping dog from St. Catharines? I couldn’t resist. I soon used the Internet to find a copy of the cover that artist Molinari did for the Italian newspaper (see below). But what was the story behind the image?



Here is where Dennis “jumped in”. After an inordinate amount of searching through newspaper indexes in both Washington and St. Catharines, he discovered that the event had taken place on August 4, 1932, out at the old St. Catharines airport, located about where Leon’s Furniture is today along the QEW east of the Canal. After weeks of secret preparations flying enthusiast Hal Brooker, from Niagara Falls, went aloft with his dog Cal in a bi-plane belonging to the St. Catharines Flying Club and piloted by Club member Dave Imrie. At about 1,800 feet the dog and his master exited the cockpit of the plane, each equipped with a parachute, got out on the wing of the plane . . . and jumped.

And both survived. It is said that the dog made a four point landing and eagerly greeted parachuting companion Brooker with wagging tail and friendly barks. The most detailed write-up of the event that Dennis found came from the same day’s issue of the *Standard*.

STANDARD. THURSDAY, AUGUST 4, 1932

FIRST CANINE JUMP FROM AEROPLANE

**Successfully Achieved at
St. Catharines Airport
This Morning**

**FOLLOWED MASTER
THROUGH THE AIR**

**A Specially Constructed
"Chute" Used for Brock-
er's Police Dog**

That article, in turn, was picked up by the Associated Press and United Press wire services and distributed around North America and around the world. Evidently someone in Italy was intrigued by the story, decided to reprint the tale in his Sunday magazine, and hired Signor Molinari to do a cover based on the story. And the rest is history.

But there is a footnote to this- Dennis's research also uncovered a couple of other articles in newspapers from Niagara Falls, New York. The first announced plans by Imrie and Brooker (and Cal) to repeat the feat at an airplane meet over in New York State in October of that same year. But the second story reported that this plan fell through when the New York State Police and officials of the local S.P.C.A. stepped in and threatened to arrest flyer and trainer if they tried to repeat their August feat. End of story, but a "first", of sorts, for St. Catharines!

SECORD, SERVOS AND NIAGARA'S FIRST MILLS

By the summer of 1778, just three years into the American Revolutionary War, provisioning at Fort Niagara had become a major problem. Supplies had to be brought from the lower St. Lawrence or even imported from Britain, and the presence of troops, Butler's Rangers, Loyalist refugees and displaced natives taxed resources to the limit. An agreement with the Seneca restricted cultivation on the east side of the Niagara River, and the only solution was to open up the west bank for settlement. Initially this was done in a highly controlled fashion. In June 1779 General Frederick Haldimand, Governor of Quebec, gave tentative approval, and in December 1780 Colonel John Butler reported that "four or five families" had built houses across the river.

One of the very first was Peter Secord, who had taken up land on the Four Mile Creek where the village of St. Davids is today. A year and a half later, in a letter dated June 12, 1782 to Captain Robert Mathews, Haldimand's Military Secretary, Butler wrote, "Peter Secord and James Seacord, Farmers, are about building a Saw and Grist Mill, which I think will be a great acquisition to this Post."

This is the first known reference to mills in the Niagara Peninsula. That much is certain. But what happened next remains somewhat of a mystery, which I intend to address in this article.

King's Mills

In his reply to Butler in July 1782 Mathews stated that the Secords were welcome to build the mills at the government's expense, but they would not be permitted to own them. The mills would belong to the Crown — in other words they were to be King's Mills. The Secords could operate the mills as tenants, and would be "allowed a reasonable profit for working them." All this was in accordance with the seigneurial system of the Province of Quebec, with the Crown assuming the role of seigneur.

Butler responded that the mills were never intended to be privately owned, and in an undated memorandum later that year he provided an estimate "for building a saw and grist mill at Peter Secord's farm." The saw mill would be built first, and the total cost would be £500 N.Y. currency. In the same memorandum he also gave an estimate for building mills in another location, this "at the head of the Four Mile Creek." Since Secord's farm was close to the creek's headwaters, it is not clear where this other site was. But Butler provides a clue when he says that at this second location (where the cost would be £50 more) "there is plenty of water for both mills, which the other has not." This suggests that, despite his use of the word "head," he had in mind a spot lower down the creek.

By November 1782 Lieutenant David Brass of the Rangers had been engaged to build the mills. He was well qualified for the task — Major John Ross, commandant at Cataraqui, referred to him as a "remarkable genius" and an "exceeding good Millwright." He had the timber cut and squared by February 1783, but delays in shipping the necessary ironwork and millstones brought the project to a halt. These items arrived by the fall, however, so the mills were likely completed before winter set in.

But where were the mills located? Were they on Secord land, or were they at the other location? Some writers assume the former, and point to the ancient Peter Secord mill that still stands on Four Mile Creek Road in St. Davids as proof. Originally built as a grist mill, it later served as an inn, and is now a private residence. In 2004 it was designated by the Town of Niagara on the Lake. In the designation by-law it is referred to as a King's Mill, and it carries a plaque bearing the date 1782-3.

But there is no solid evidence that this was the grist mill built by Brass, nor indeed is there proof that the mills he erected were anywhere on Secord land. At the same time there is ample evidence for the other location, which turns out to be seven miles downstream just above the Four Mile Pond, through which the creek entered Lake Ontario.

Mills are mentioned many times in letters sent back and forth between Niagara and Quebec in 1782 and 1783, but apart from Butler's tantalizing reference to the "head" there are no clues as to the second location. But a letter written to Haldimand in July 1784 by Lieutenant-Colonel Arent DePeyster, newly arrived as commandant at Fort Niagara, does contain a hint. The letter concerns the fact that Brass and his co-workers had still not been paid, and gives the location of the mills as "the Four Mile Run," which could well mean the approach to the pond.

This is confirmed by a map of the "Settlement at Niagara" drawn by Allan MacDonell in 1783, which shows a "grist mill & Saw mill" above the Four Mile Pond, but nothing on Secord land upstream. A second map drawn by Philip Frey in 1788 shows essentially the same thing. When Butler used the word "head," therefore, he most likely meant the head of the pond, not the creek.

Further evidence comes from a list of mills in the Home District prepared in 1792 by surveyor Augustus Jones for John Graves Simcoe, first Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada. By this time privately-owned mills were permitted, and 20 appear on the list, together with the name of the builder, the year of construction and by what authority it was built. Two entries are of special significance. The

first is for a grist mill built on the Four Mile Creek by Peter Secord "on the verbal Promise made him by Lord Dorchester." But the date of construction is given as 1789, not 1783.

The second entry reads in full, "A Grist Mill on a Creek called the Four Mile near the King's Mills, in the year 1791, by Daniel Servos, on ungranted Lands." A former Sergeant in the Rangers, Servos is known to have settled near the mouth of Four Mile Creek at an early date — he called his land Palatine Hill — which makes the phrase "near the King's Mills" very significant. Furthermore, documentary evidence shows that by 1785 Servos was running a business dealing largely in lumber and flour. Where did these products come from? Since the requirement that all mills be Crown-owned was not relaxed until 1786, this implies that the original tenant of the King's Mills had to be Servos himself.

The conclusion is clear. Though the Secords were the first to suggest that mills be built in Niagara, the King's Mills erected in 1783 were located not on Secord land but downstream near the head of the Four Mile Pond, and the first operator was Daniel Servos. The grist mill that survives in St. Davids was built by Peter Secord in 1789 and was never a King's Mill.

Seigneurial and Privately-Owned Mills

In 1784 King's Mills were built at Cataraqui, but they and the Niagara mills fell far short of meeting settlers' needs. Accordingly, on February 16, 1786, it was declared that privately owned grist mills could now be built, though only under strict conditions. Fifteen potential mill sites were identified in various townships, and if the person occupying one of these sites built a mill at his own expense he would be granted the rights of seigneur for a period of 15 years. The mill had to be completed by "November next," and it had to be kept in constant repair. At the end of the 15 years ownership would revert to the Crown, without any compensation being paid. The government did make one small concession though: "For the greater encouragement of the undertaker one batteau, properly manned" would be available to bring millstones from Lachine.

Three of the potential mill sites were in the Niagara Peninsula. One was for a wind mill on Lake Erie, and the other two for water mills. The latter were to be located "between the Great Falls and Chipeway Creek," and "at the Falls above the 12 mile Pond, 10 miles from the Lake, and 16 from the Garrison." The first site was on the Niagara River just downstream of Dufferin Islands (on what became Lot 174 of Stamford following the township survey), and the other was on the Twelve Mile Creek in Power Glen (later Lot 22, Concession 10 of Grantham). The "undertaker" on the first site, John Burch, may have completed his mills by the deadline, but not his counterpart on the second site, Duncan Murray. It was not Murray's fault, however,

for he fell victim to an undertaker of a different sort when he was killed by a falling tree. His partly-built mills were transferred to Queenston merchant Robert Hamilton, who completed them, with permission from the authorities, a year late.

The policy change of 1786 did not lead to many mills being built, and since it involved the seigneurial system, it served only to produce "much uneasiness and ... discontent among the inhabitants," to quote Cataraqui merchant Richard Cartwright. Not surprisingly, just two years later the regulations on mill building were loosened further, this in conjunction with the introduction of freehold land tenure. Anyone granted land was now free to erect mills, resulting in a mini-boom in mill construction.

This is reflected in the census of mills commissioned by Simcoe after his arrival in Upper Canada. Surveyor General D.W. Smith was nominally in charge, but the actual returns were prepared by the deputy surveyors for each district, who sought such details as "whether [the mills were] occupied, by whom, on what condition, authority, tenure, since what period, together with all other circumstances relative thereto." Augustus Jones' return for the Home District has already been mentioned, and it makes for interesting reading.

The first two mills on the list are Burch's and Murray's. On the Four Mile Creek, aside from Peter Secord's 1789 grist mill (which was on Lot 92 of Niagara Township) and Daniel Servos' 1791 grist mill (on Lot 194), we have two saw mills, one built by David Secord in 1791 (lot unstated) and another by Samson Lutes in 1792 (Lot 89). The King's Mills are not listed, suggesting that the grist mill at least had been supplanted by Servos' 1791 mill.

Space allows me to mention only a few other mills, all on the Twelve Mile Creek. One of these, of course, was the Murray/Hamilton mill, completed in 1787. Three others appear on Jones' list: a grist mill built by David Secord in 1791 on Lot, 5, Concession 4 of Pelham, a saw mill built by Benjamin Canby in 1792 on Lot 134 of Thorold, and a saw mill "now erecting on one of the Branches of a Creek called the twelve Mile" by John DeCew on Lot 58 of Thorold.

The branch in question was Beaverdams Creek, and the mill was located just across the road from the present-day remains of DeCew's stone house. It is sometimes stated that DeCew had a grist mill on the same site, but this is not likely. He built a grist mill with a 16-foot overshot wheel at DeCew Falls (where Morningstar Mill is now), but it was most likely after the War of 1812 since he did not buy the land in question until just before war broke out.

Credits: layout (Loris Gasparotto); editing (John Burniak)

Note: an expanded version of this article, including illustrations and sources, is available on request at the email address below.

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