



The Historical Society of St. Catharines

*NEW Address * 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 vicinity.

Founded in 1927. Our Society is affiliated with the Ontario Historical Society.

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

November 2010 Newsletter

2010 is the Year of the British Home Child in Canada

UPCOMING PROGRAMMES & EVENTS

Our monthly Membership meetings are held at the St. Catharines Museum. Doors open at 7:00 p.m. and the Museum is also open at 7:00 p.m. so members may view current exhibits. The Society meeting starts at 7:30 p.m. sharp. Reminder: as our members are inside the Burgoyne Room and unable to monitor those entering the Museum, the Museum's doors will be locked at approximately 7:45 p.m. on meeting nights. Members are reminded to be on time, but if they are late, ring the doorbell to the right of the main doors.

Thursday November 25 - 7:30 p.m. This is an expanded version of our popular "Show and Tell" night. The evening will be given over to anyone who wishes to display artefacts, keepsakes and family treasures that are not just related to Niagara, but a larger sphere. So open up those trunks, pillage the attic, dig up something of interest from your family and share it with others.

Monday November 29 – 10:30 a.m. The Welland Canals Foundation and the City of Port Colborne cordially invite you to celebrate William Hamilton Merritt Day. The 2010 theme is the Welland Canal – Past, Present and Future. Keynote speaker is Richard Corfe, Advisor to the Board of Directors of the St. Lawrence Seaway. At the Canalside Pub and Eatery Inn, 232 West Street, Port Colborne. RSVP 905.834.1668 ext.234 or e-mail allainakane@portcolborne.ca

Thursday December 2, 2010 The Annual Meeting of the Lundy's Lane Historical Society will be held at the Niagara Falls Public Library on Victoria Ave. At 7:30 p.m.

Saturday December 4, 2010 A Victorian Christmas Party will be hosted by the Thorold and Beaverdams Historical Society, 2 Vine Street in Thorold from 11 to 2.

On now until January 9, 2011 The St. Catharine Museum is hosting the exhibit Arts of China: Glimpses of an Ancient Civilization. Reminder to Members – If you arrive at a

general meeting of the Historical Society at 7:00 p.m. you have a full half-hour access to this exhibit free of charge.



Thursday January 27, 2011 dann j. broyld from Howard University will address the general membership at 7:30 p.m. at the St. Catharines Museum. His talk is entitled Borderland Blacks: Rochester, New York and St. Catharines 1850 to 1860.

Monday January 31, 2011 Annual meeting and Show and Tell at the Thorold and Beaverdams Historical Society 7:30 p.m. at Chestnut Hall, 2 Vine Street, Thorold.

Saturday February 19, 2011 Third Niagara Heritage Book Fair at the Senior Citizens Centre, 18 Livingston Avenue, Grimsby – from 10 to 2:30 – free admission, free parking.

February 24, 2011 7:30 p.m. Harald Ensslen, a local architect will address the Society on the topic of: "Why architecture matters, mid-century design in St. Catharines". This event will occur at the St. Catharines Museum.

Monday February 28, 2011 Roger Bradshaw will present a lecture on the Relics of the First, Second and Third Welland Canals at the Thorold & Beaverdams Historical Society meeting 7:30 p.m. at Chestnut Hall, 2 Vine Street, Thorold.

Thursday March 24, 2011 7:30 p.m. Alun Hughes will give a talk on Power Glen Thursday April 28, 20117:30 p.m. The St. Catharines Historical Society's Annual General Meeting to be held at the St. Catharines Museum. + John Burt nick on hist. of Merr. churches.

May 26 - gail

NEW BOOKS

Collins + the tome Cheldren.

Author David F. Hemmings has produced a 180 printed page book titled Laura Ingersoll **Second** which contains information on her life, petitions and publicity, descendants listing. ancestry chart, belongings, bibliography and pictures of monuments, paintings and places Fully indexed. The price is \$20.00. Contact the author at connected to Laura. bygonespublishing@gmail.com to find out how you can buy your Christmas present.

The Mayholme Foundation has just published a book by Brian Tibbs entitled: They did not return: Honouring St. Catharines War Dead. The book covers WWII, Korea and The book is available for \$39.95 by calling 905.934.1173 or e-mail Afghanistan. mayholme@mayholme.ca

NOTICES

The Board has received the resignation of Joe Muskat from the Board of the Society. Joe has served on the Board since 2001. We wish to thank Joe for his years of service.

Dennis Gannon will assume his role as a new director at the end of January when he arrives back in St. Catharines.

The passing of Sarah Kuchard on October 27, 2010. Sarah is the mother of Carla Kuchard.

Newsletter Notes

The Historical Society of St. Catharines *Newsletter* is published up to 4 times per year by the Society.

The purpose of the *Newsletter* 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 postal address. Opinions and comments expressed in the *Newsletter* are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect those of the Society.

Subscription is by paid membership only. This issue was produced by John Calvert.

The Society's new postal address is:

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

Note: Please forward any submissions by e-mail to John at: jcalvert57@hotmail.com

Next Issue: March 2011 - Deadline for submissions for the next issue is March 1

The Society gratefully acknowledges the support of the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation

The Sons of William Hamilton Merritt

By John Burtniak

Most of us know William Hamilton Merritt for the Welland Canal. We rightly salute him as the "Father of Canadian Transportation" for he was interested and involved in, not only canals but also in railways and bridges, among other things related to transportation. William was also a family man with his wife Catherine. They were the proud parents of three sons: Jedediah Prendergast, William Hamilton Junior, and Thomas Rodman.

Jedediah Prendergast was born in St. Catharines on June 1, 1820 and died on November 18, 1900. We who have become familiar with him call him "J.P." as he styled himself, for that was the practice then to use one's initials. After local schooling, he attended Cambridge University, where, after one term, he joined his brother William Hamilton Junior at the university in Bonn and then returned to Cambridge. During his next vacation time he visited France, Switzerland and Italy. He returned home in 1844 and thereafter held the post of Postmaster of St. Catharines for 18 years.

In 1859 he returned to Britain for a visit, with a special mission, which he accomplished. Jedediah secured historical materials from the Crown Lands Office, the Registrar General's Department, and other. Further, a valuable collection of historical documents relating to Canadian history were purchased and brought to Toronto. It came to pass with support of his father (who himself was interested in the preservation of archival materials) that J.P. was appointed to seek out and locate documents from across Great Britain pertaining to Upper Canada. He succeeded in arranging for copyists, with the result that over 10,000 pages of transcripts were brought to Canada. This was the beginning of our Archives, with J.P. and George Coventry blazing the trail. Here J.P. found his true calling.

The 1850's were the great period of the birth of local historical societies and J.P. was in the centre of it all, if not always in the forefront. From 1863 he was for several years the President of the Historical Society of British North America here in St. Catharines, all the while earnestly soliciting the preservation of historical documents and recording historical information. As well, he soon took up the pen with zeal and diligence, becoming a frequent contributor to papers local and beyond, with articles, poetry and commentary. He produced pamphlets, including one published on the occasion of the visit of the Prince of Wales to St. Catharines in 1860. He compiled the 430 page <u>Biography</u> of his father, published in 1875, and he guided Benson Lossing around the War of 1812 sites in the Niagara Peninsula when Lossing was writing his <u>The Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812</u>, published in 1868.

Jedediah Prendergast --- J.P. --- had a long and productive life as a collector, recorder, chronicler, biographer and writer. He left us a notable legacy and we are very grateful.

The second son, William Hamilton Junior, was born on July 4, 1822 and died in St. Catharines on May 25, 1860. His education included time in Bonn, Paris and London. His father described him as a finished French scholar, speaking and pronouncing the pure Parisian French, reading and writing the language with ease. In another year, after mastering completely French and German and perhaps Spanish and Italian, he would turn to law. This he did, qualifying at the head of his class, but he apparently never practised as a barrister. His father wanted William Hamilton Junior to become a statesman. He was elected to St. Catharines Town Council in 1851, became President of the St. Catharines and Merrittville Turnpike Road Company, was active in the Welland Railway and subsequently was its Managing Director until his death in 1860. Development of the mineral waters in St. Catharines attracted his attention, as it did his father and his other brothers. William Hamilton Junior was beginning to develop his estate, Monte Bello, when that project was cut short by his untimely death. He was a relatively young age and it was a painful blow to his father. The City later acquired the property for the park we know today.

The third son, **Thomas Rodman**, perhaps the best known of the three brothers, was born on October 17, 1824 in Mayville, New York and died on January 11, 1906 in St. Catharines. After attending Upper Canada College and Grantham Academy, "T.R." embarked upon various business ventures. In partnership with the Honourable James Benson, in 1844, and then on his own account after 1846, he became involved in milling, owning and running his own ships in transport between the upper and lower provinces and operating vessels between St. Catharines and Brantford by way of the Welland Canal and the Grand River.

There were also other commercial and community interests that occupied his time. T.R was a member of Town Council, promoter and later, the President of the Niagara District Bank. With its merger with the Imperial Bank of Commerce, in 1875, he became Vice-President and later President from 1902 until his death. When his brother, William Hamilton Junior died in 1860, T.R. was appointed Chairman and Managing Director of the Board of the Welland Railway, serving until it was acquired by the Grand Trunk Railway. He also served as President of the Security Loan and Savings Company, of the St. Catharines Gas Light Company, of the Welland Loan Company, and the Niagara Falls Suspension Bridge Company and a co-founder of Ridley College in 1888. He was elected to the House of Commons in 1868 and re-elected in 1872, but declined to stand at the next election despite the unanimous invitation to run again.

Of course, it is with Rodman Hall that we usually associate Thomas Rodman. He built this superb estate and mansion between 1853 and 1862. Some materials intended for his brother's home, Monte Bello, were used at Rodman Hall, after work stopped when William Hamilton Junior died. Rodman Hall was, and is truly St. Catharines' mansion and it represents the style and taste of the period. It was particularly a residence befitting of one who had done well in the world of commerce and finance and who attained high offices and deserved honours.

That Rodman Hall, the palatial home of Thomas Rodman and his wife, Mary, should be used for cultural purposes, as it has now done for fifty or more year, as a place for collecting and showing works of art, as a place of gathering for those who appreciate art and culture, and now as Brock University's art gallery, a place of learning for young people, would please them very much.

In conclusion, it can be said that Jedediah Prendergast, William Hamilton Junior, and Thomas Rodman, were worthy sons of William Hamilton and Catherine Merritt. Their father can be called a trailblazer, to use a common phrase, while his sons, of the second generation, notwithstanding perhaps the benefit of a touch of privilege, did make their own real contributions in business, commerce, culture and letters. By dint of their determination and hard work, they accomplished much and we should acknowledge them for this.

The Historical Society of St. Catharines would like to give a big welcome to our newest members:

Judy & Peter Goodburn Helen M. Szakacs Janine Verhenne Simon Hall Joanne Atkinson Roger Guertin Dennis Goring
David F. Hemmings
Helen Heyko
Kevin McCabe
Carlos Garcia

A Christmas gift suggestion. Give friends and relatives a Membership in the Historical Society of St. Catharines. "A gift that just keeps giving."

The Women's Literary Club of St. Catharines

By Bill Stevens

The Women's Literary Club of St. Catharines was organized when Mrs. J.G. Currie, considered the founding member, held a meeting at the YMCA on Queen Street on December 3, 1892, at which fifteen women attended. Mrs. May E. McClive became the first President. The group grew to forty-one members within the first year. The Club met in the afternoon in various halls: the Banner Hall, the Beaver Hall, YMCA, Wherry's Hall, Church Sunday Schools, the Oban Inn when it was where C.K.T.B. is now, Mill's Memorial, Camera Club, Chamber of Commerce, and St. Hilda's School for Girls on Yates Street. When Mrs. Currie suffered an accident in 1898 and was unable to go out, she invited the Club to her home. Others followed suit and it became the customer of members to entertain the Club in their homes.

The 1890's was an era of horse and buggy, but many of the members also had bicycles. They would go cycling all the way to Grimsby Beach where one of the members had a summer cottage. In 1896 the Club decided to hold a pilgrimage to see historical sites in Niagara-on-the-Lake where William Kirby acted as their guide. It was such a success that this became an annual affair known as The Pilgrimage to Historical Sites. Livery stables, Sanderson's on May Street and Traceys, would provide the Club with vans or large carioles for these outings. In 1898, five vans assembled to convey the members to Queenston Heights.

It was through the study and promotion of this area's history that resulted in the Club installing several markers at historical sites, including: at St. David's commemorating the Burning of St. David's by the Americans in 1813; one at MacKenzie House; one at the Homestead of Laura Second; and one at the foot of Queenston Heights to commemorate the strategy of General Sheaffe's Road to Victory.

It was also during the first decade of the Club that Mrs. Currie wrote the "Life of Laura Secord and Canadian Reminiscences". When this was published, she used the funds to promote the erection of a monument to Laura Secord. She importuned the Government of help and in 1910 the present monument at Queenston Heights was unveiled. The Literary Club attended and laid a wreath. Newspapers reported that over 3000 attended the ceremony.

Sir Roger Hale Sheaffe was born in 1763 in Boston, Massachusetts. He was a member of the British 5th Foot that came into Upper Canada in 1787. By 1802 Sheaffe was in command or part of the 49th Regiment stationed at Fort George. When the American force invaded at Queenston and General Brock was killed, it was Sheaffe who took command and eventually

led the British forces to victory in Queenston Heights. In 1908, the Women's Literary Club of St. Catharines erected a marker near the site where Sheaffe led his forces up to the heights of Queenston. The Club minutes of June 5, 1909 read: "At the lowest spot on the mountain range there will be a marker to show where General Sheaffe ascended the Heights taking the enemy in the rear, producing such glorious results. This will be called "Sheaffe's Pass" to commemorate the third engagement of the 13th October 1812. The marker read: "Sheaffe's Path to Victory October 13th 1812."

The Club held its last official meeting on February 19, 1994.

Membership Notes:

Former Members of the Society who have not renewed their membership will be called by Members of the Board. If you have not renewed for 2010 / 11, please complete and mail your membership renewal below.

The Membership year is from September 1 to August 31.

Individual \$10.00 or Family \$15 Please mail renewals to the Socie			
Please enter my/our member This is a New Membership _	ship in the Society as: This is a Re	Individual	Family
Name(s)			
Address			
Telephone			
For those who would like to local historical events, we arbelow: Yes	receive Society e-mail e preparing an " undisc "	reminders of upo losed recipient"	coming programmes or
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Looking back... with Alun Hughes

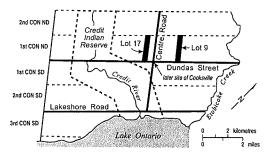
JOHANN SCHILLER: FATHER OF CANADIAN WINE?

The year 2011 is being heralded as the 200th anniversary of the Canadian wine industry, for it was in 1811 that Johann Schiller is said to have established Canada's first-ever commercial winery. Surprisingly perhaps, it was not located in one of today's centres of winemaking, such as the Niagara Peninsula. Instead it was north of Lake Ontario in what is now a very urban part of Mississauga.

Schiller's Story

Schiller was of German origin, and fought for the Crown in the American Revolutionary War. As a corporal with the 29th Regiment of Foot, he would have served mainly along the St. Lawrence and the headwaters of the Hudson. In October, 1789 he successfully petitioned for 400 acres of land south of Montreal close to the United States border. But he was unable to take possession of his land because the boundaries were never laid out by a surveyor. As he stated in a follow-up petition to the governor of Lower Canada in January, 1796, this left him in dire straits, "without means of procuring ... subsistence" for his wife and four infant children.

By July, 1798 he had moved to Upper Canada, working as a shoemaker in Niagara Township. He again petitioned for land, pointing out that he had "never located" the lands promised him in Lower Canada. But it was not until July 23, 1806 that he was granted 400 acres in newly-surveyed Toronto Township (now part of Mississauga), specifically lots 9 and 17 in the first concession north of Dundas Street. Lot 17 was to become his homestead, but he may not have moved there until 1809, as his name does not appear in surveyor Samuel Wilmot's list of township settlers in 1807/08.



Schiller's land in Toronto Township

In 1810 and 1811 he submitted affidavits stating that he had completed the required settlement duties on his lots. On lot 17, this meant clearing and fencing five acres, building a house measuring 16 by 20 feet, clearing half the road allowance alongside and cutting down the trees up to 100 feet from the road. He received patents conveying formal title to the lots in 1811, but sold lot 9 the following year. He died on October 12, 1816.

It was on lot 17 that Schiller would have made his wine. The lot lay just west of the intersection of Dundas Street and Centre Road (now Hurontario), which was to become the site of the village of Harrisville (later renamed Cooksville). According to Linda Bramble in Niagara's Wine Visionaries, he domesticated the wild vines that grew nearby, and by 1811 had supplemented these with American hybrids from Pennsylvania. He produced enough wine to sell to his neighbours, and is thus considered "the father of commercial winemaking in Canada." This is quite the accolade, one that is repeated by many other writers, and it is pertinent to ask what Schiller did to deserve such a distinction.

Wine before Schiller

Though he was definitely a pioneer, Schiller was actually a late arrival on the Canadian winemaking scene, for we know of others making wine long before 1811 (though not for sale). If we discount the possibility that Norse explorer Lief Eriksson gave the name Vinland to Newfoundland because of the wild grapes he found there in 1001, all the early references to grapes and wine occur in the writings of French explorers, administrators and missionaries.

Both Jacques Cartier in 1535 and Samuel de Champlain in 1603 commented on the abundance of grapes growing wild along the St. Lawrence. One of the earliest reports of anyone making wine appears in Jesuit priest Paul Le Jeune's Relation of 1636, in which he writes, "some have made wine ... I tasted it, and it seemed to me very good." The Jesuits and other missionaries of course required wine for sacramental purposes, but almost all of it was imported (Spanish wine being a favourite). There are also references to grapes and wine in the writings of several European travellers who came to North America in the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1749 Swedish-born traveller Peter Kalm even mentions French grapevines planted in Montreal gardens, but adds that making wine was "not worth while." Instead the grapes were eaten as a dessert.

Prior to the American Revolutionary War what is now Ontario was largely the domain of native peoples, who themselves never made wine. Some of the Loyalist and other settlers who arrived in the late 18th century no doubt brought winemaking skills with them, but references to wine and even grapes are few and far between. In 1793 Elizabeth Simcoe, wife of the first Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada and a meticulous diarist, mentions that she "gathered wild grapes ... pleasant but not sweet" at York. She also cites a case of impromptu winemaking, when soldiers laying out Dundas Street (which ran alongside what was to become Schiller's land) "turned out very tolerable wine" from the

wild grapes found nearby. But making wine was rare, and most of the wine consumed in Upper Canada was imported from Europe. Whisky, rum and beer were the beverages of choice anyway.

Schiller as Vintner

There is in fact little evidence of winemaking in Upper Canada until Schiller arrived on the scene. He is the first winemaker to be identified by name, and the consensus is that he played a crucial role in the development of the industry. What Bramble is quoted above as saying is typical of many writers, and it comes as no surprise when Tony Aspler in The Wine Atlas of Canada refers to Schiller as the "acknowledged" father of Canadian wine. Not everyone agrees, however, for Rod Phillips in his book Ontario Wine Country claims that "Schiller is too insubstantial a figure" to warrant any such title. Though Phillips is very much a lone voice, his comment does raise the important question: what evidence exists to support the Schiller claim?

The answer is, not much. Significantly, none of the many books and articles on winemaking in Ontario and Canada cites a contemporary source (i.e., one dating from the early 19th century) that links Schiller and wine. The various Schiller-related documents that survive from this era (petitions, land grants, etc.) say nothing, and aside from stating that he had been a "constable of the peace" and shoemaker and later served as juryman and township poundkeeper, provide no details of what he did.

The first known references to Schiller and wine do not come until over a century later, in the form of two anonymous newspaper articles, the first in the Evening Telegram on September 10, 1929, and the second in the Globe on April 22, 1934. Both were reprinted shortly after in local papers (the Brampton Conservator and the Port Credit News respectively). But they contain little by way of solid evidence. To quote from the *Globe*, "in his rambles with a gun, looking for game [Schiller] was struck by the resemblance of wild grapes on the banks of the Credit to those in the vineyards of his Fatherland [the Rhineland]. Cutting slips of the vines, he began cultivation on a sunny slope at the rear of his home. The vines prospered [and] Schiller and his sons became vintners in a modest way, but found it hard, almost impossible, to compete with the thenflourishing whiskey trade."

This article also makes two claims about Schiller, one questionable, the other false, that hardly inspire confidence. The first (which also appears in the Telegram) is that he was the originator of the Clinton grape variety, and the second is that in 1811 he saved the French wine industry by exporting root stock that was immune to the phylloxera pest ravaging European vineyards. This second claim is emblazoned in the Globe headline, which reads, "French Wine Industry Saved by Canadian Living at Cooksville." But it is simply wrong — if Cooksville

vines helped bail out French winemakers (and this is not clear), it would not have been until post 1870, long after Schiller was dead.

These articles seem to be the sole sources for the Schiller story (the *Port Credit News* reprint of the *Globe* article is actually cited in William Rannie's *Wines of Ontario* in 1978), and they are less than convincing. While there is no reason to doubt that Schiller may have made wine, one wonders how much of a "vintner" he could possibly have been by 1811. After all, he was not granted his land until 1806, may not have occupied it until 1809, and had to perform settlement duties on two lots (two miles apart) in what was then basically a wilderness.

Though there is no early evidence of Schiller and wine, it turns out that there are sources linking others, if not to winemaking, at least to grapegrowing. During the War of 1812 many farmers and property owners in Upper Canada suffered serious losses at the hands of both American and British troops, and later submitted claims for damages. Typically they were for livestock killed, fences destroyed, crops trampled, barns burned and items stolen. But Thomas Merritt of Grantham Township also claimed for the loss of grape vines, and the mere fact that he did so suggests that these were not just wild grapes growing at the bottom of the yard. Robert Kerr of Niagara Township went further, claiming for the loss of "a large nursery of grafted and innoculated [sic] fruit trees" and "four vineyards" all part of "the best garden in the province." Merrift and Kerr had occupied their land far longer than Schiller and were clearly growing grapes. While their reason for doing so is unknown, it could well have included making wine.

Conclusion

What little evidence there is suggests that Schiller did nothing out of the ordinary, and certainly nothing to merit the honour that has been bestowed on him. Probably the only reason we know of him at all is that lot 17 in Toronto Township was still being used for grape-growing long after his death. In the 1860s, Justin de Courtenay established a well-known winery called Clair House on the lot, and Schiller's role as the one who "started it all" may well have become part of local lore, even though that role may have been little more than making wine for himself. The lack of contemporary evidence is telling, especially when there is solid proof that others were at the very least growing grapes around the same time. Two unattributed newspaper articles containing serious errors and written over a century after the event prove nothing. Unless further research yields new evidence, the case for celebrating Schiller as the father of Canadian winemaking remains problematic.

Principal Sources (in addition to those cited in the text): available on request. Credits: map and layout (Loris Gasparotto); editing (John Burtniak); sources (Dorothy Kew, Emma Duncan).