

Historical Society of St. Catharines **NEWSLETTER**

P.O. Box 24123, 80 King St., St. Catharines, ON L2R 7P7 905/682-6053

OCTOBER 1995

GOOD NEWS FROM DECEW FALLS:

Let the record show that as of May 6, 1995, the Friends of Morningstar Mill at DeCew Falls finally achieved success.

By any normal standard it is obvious that the Friends, who have been refurbishing the mill since the early 1990s, had already achieved a great deal of success long before then. However, they themselves had defined success as not just being able to grind wheat into flour -- they have been able to do that for years now, powering the mill machinery with **electric** power. No, for the Friends **REAL** success would consist of running the mill on **water** power, using water to turn the turbine just as Wilson Morningstar did during his 50 years operating the Mill, 1883 to 1933.



It was this that occurred for the first time on May 6th. The process was shown off for the press in June and was demonstrated to the public in early August during the Mill's annual Grist and Chopping Show. Congratulations to the Friends for passing another milestone in their long struggle to refurbish the mill.

It is fortunate that we are able to illustrate this article with an image of Morningstar Mill and DeCew Falls (left) painted by Hamilton artist T. H. Wilkinson, a frequent visitor to the mill early in this century. This painting came back to the City of St. Catharines just a week or so ago in the hands of Jon Jouppien, local art collector and heritage resource consultant. So while we're saluting the gargantuan efforts of the Friends of Morningstar Mill, let's also give a tip of the hat to Jon for rescuing this interesting painting from the walls (or the attic!) of some unknown collector and bringing it "back home" to St. Catharines.

The Mill at DeCew Falls
by T. H. Wilkinson

HISTORICAL SOCIETY SCHEDULE 1995-1996:

In the coming year, from October through May, the Historical Society of St. Catharines will have public meetings at **7:30 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month** in Mills Room of the St. Catharines Public Library. The meetings are open free of charge to everyone, member or non-member. The following is a list of the speakers and topics scheduled for 1995-1996. For further information call 682-6053.

October 5, 1995: **"The Battle of Queenston Heights"**

with Bob Malcomson, author of a recent book on the Battle of Queenston Heights, the pivotal War of 1812 battle in which Major-General Sir Isaac Brock died.

November 2, 1995 **"Art and Artists of Niagara"**

with James Campbell, Curator, the Weir Foundation and Library of Art, Queenston.

December 7, 1995: **"The History of the Grantham Academy/St. Catharines Collegiate"**

with Jim Love, Professor Emeritus, Brock University Department of Education;

January 4, 1996: **"The Mapping of St. Catharines"**

Alun Hughes, Professor of Geography, Brock University, will trace the laying out and mapping of the City of St. Catharines, 1796 to date.

February 1, 1996: **"The Underground Railroad: the Freedom Trail to Canada."**

featuring excerpts from a new PBS documentary about the flight of slaves to freedom in Canada via the Underground Railroad, and by a panel discussion with the film's producer and local persons involved in this project.

March 7, 1996: **"Women's Signs and Signs of Women"**

Margaret Glassford of Brock University will talk about the history of women in business in St. Catharines.

April 4, 1996: **"The Architecture of St. Catharines"**

with architect Norm Macdonald, partner in the architectural firm of Macdonald & Zuberec.

May 2, 1996: **"St. Catharines, the Garden City: Period Gardens in St. Catharines"**

Pleasance Crawford discusses the importance of the gardening and landscaping "industries" in our local economy and will review significant gardens of 19th century St. Catharines.

HISTORICAL CALENDAR 1996:

After our success in publishing our 1994 and 1995 historical calendars, the Historical Society has decided to carry on the tradition into 1996. As in previous years, the calendar will feature thirteen interesting, historic photos of St. Catharines during the last one hundred years -- one photo for each month and a thirteenth for the cover. The calendars will cost just \$6 a piece. They will serve as an attractive and interesting way for you to mark off the days and months of the coming year, and would also be nice Christmas gifts for your friends and relatives.

We hope to have the calendars back from the printer and available for purchase at our meeting this Thursday, October 5. Failing that, we will have a mockup of the calendar available for review and we will be taking orders for them. You may also order them by calling us at 682-6053.

DOWNTOWN WALKING TOURS

In our last newsletter we shared with our readers the welcome surprise we got just as the Society was preparing for its usual summer break -- a call from the St. Catharines Downtown Association, asking if we would conduct walking tours of downtown as part of their Canada Week activities in early July. We could hardly turn down an opportunity to interest people in the history of this city, so we quickly said yes.

Result: the Society gave five tours of downtown and drew a turnout of just under 200 participants, more than we or the Downtown Association had expected. The Downtown Association was so happy with the results that they asked us to do one more walk in early September, and in turn the Society has proposed that the two organizations collaborate again next summer on another series of walks.



Photo by Lori Berges

The Historical Society President stands atop a planter in front of One St. Paul Street, addressing participants in one of the Society's July walking tours.

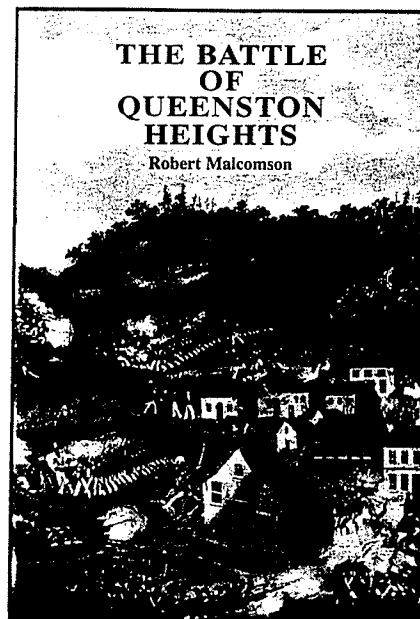
WRITING ABOUT THE BATTLE OF QUEENSTON HEIGHTS

by Robert Malcomson

Bob Malcomson was born in 1949 in Toronto, grew up in Welland, and now lives in St. Catharines with his wife and two daughters. He is an elementary school teacher in Thorold. When not in school Bob spends a good deal of his time researching and writing history, with special emphasis on naval history, Great Lakes history, and the War of 1812. He had his first historical article published in 1976 and since then his work has appeared in numerous historical publications, including the Beaver magazine and Inland Sea. Bob has also written three books, including **The HMS Detroit and the Battle for Lake Erie** (1990) and **The Battle of Queenston Heights** (1995). Bob has several other research and publishing projects in the works now, one a history of Brock's monument, another a study of the 1813 Battle of Beaver Dams.

The pre-trial sessions in the O. J. Simpson case were underway as I commenced the first, serious draught of the manuscript that became **The Battle of Queenston Heights**, and, believe it or not, the actions of Marcia Clark and the others actually helped me to understand the events of 13 October 1812. Like the evidence revealed about the real-life who-dunnit in L.A., information regarding the battle varies from confirmably reliable to disturbingly contradictory. I was intrigued to hear the different accounts given by witnesses at the hearings and to see how the prosecutors and attorneys tried to pin down the facts and then construct likely scenarios from the evidence. In many ways, the task of a history writer is the same: consult the witnesses, gather the evidence, compose a sensible narrative and hope the jury (the reader) finds in your favour.

I was already pretty familiar with the battle, having written an article about it for **The Beaver**, but I made the point of re-reading other versions of the incident before examining the primary sources once more. I relied chiefly on the reports and letters in Cruikshank's **Documentary History of the Campaigns . . . in 1812-14** to which I had added other articles and narratives, the most important of which was the journal of John Norton, the Native leader. Some information that has been treated as gospel truth, like Brock being present at the redan battery when it was attacked, I discounted because it came from sources who had not been present at the event, in that case, young W. H. Merritt. Information that I had not seen portrayed adequately in other popular renditions, such as the significant role played by Norton's men, was validated by the eyewitnesses and





General Brock

highlighted in my version of the battle.

One source of information upon which I did not rely too heavily is word of mouth. I spoke with many people about the battle and debated some points with them, but usually when I asked for their sources, they could not name them or find them. I wanted to call out: "Objection, your honour! That testimony is hearsay!"

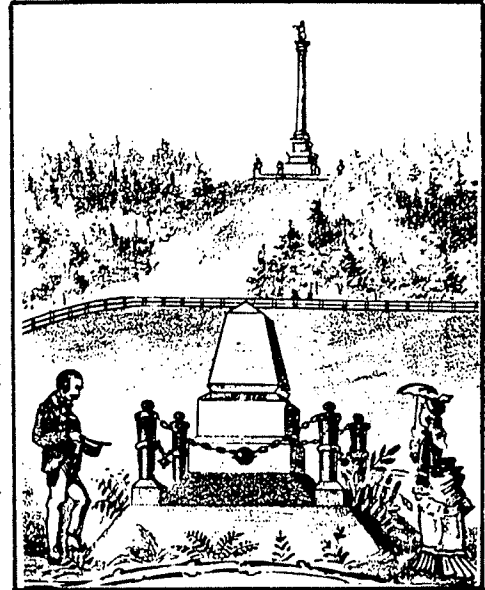
An experience that taught me a great deal about the battle of Queenston, or any battle, was serving as a volunteer interpreter at Fort George. A couple of summers ago I volunteered about one day a week at the fort in the guise of a Royal Newf, learning the drill, forging beam hooks, polishing ordnance. Since then I have participated in programs at the fort and each time I learn something new about what it was like to be a soldier in those long ago days -- the weight of a musket, the grime of a stifling day encased in wool, the smell of volleys, the barking of orders. I mix all those impressions with the facts and speculations to create my narratives.

Prior to writing the book, I had been to the Queenston Heights battlefield many times and figured I understood the terrain, I was nearly finished with the first draught of the manuscript, however, when I ended up standing with Bob Foley on the edge of the river at Queenston filming a segment of his cable television show. It was on that day that I became aware, for the first time, about the flow of the river's currents by watching the fishing boats drift up one shore and down the next. None of the accounts mentioned the implications of currents on the path followed by craft crossing from Lewiston to Queenston, so I ended up speculating in the book that long curving routes were followed. I think the interpretation has credence, and I hope some future researchers can find some solid proof for it.

While wrestling with the evidence, I also had to consider the length of the manuscript. The Friends of Fort George wanted to publish a sixty to seventy page booklet that would be readable and well-illustrated, so I knew that I would have to leave out details about many aspects of the action in order to fit that format. I wrote a 24,000 word manuscript in a couple of weeks, which I eventually reduced, some months later, by half. I am convinced that there is a terrific, one hundred thousand word book waiting to be written about the topic, but as anybody who has written for specified publication knows, word count limits control how the story will be told. So, if you've read the book and wonder why things are missing, there's the explanation!

Early forms of the manuscript were sent to people who agreed to read them critically. Their comments were very helpful and encouraging, especially the insights I gained from readers who were not familiar with the genre and complained about the confusing military terms. Although a dozen people read the manuscript, spelling errors and inconsistencies persisted, much to my amusement and frustration. They were still being cut out on the day before the printing began; with some success at last, it seems, for I can find only one misplaced letter in the finished product.

Since I was in charge of the whole project, I was able to select the art to be used, get the maps done, find a desk top publisher and a printer and work with them to produce the book. From the time I began to concentrate on the writing until the book was published, nine months passed. Compared to another project on which I am working, that is light speed, but then **The Battle of Queenston Heights** is just a little book, a monograph, according to proper terminology. Nevertheless, it is aimed mainly at people with a casual interest in history and I hope it gives them a good read. I know that the experience of creating the book taught me a great deal about historical research and writing, and left me with an appropriate measure of pride. In fact, I liked it so much that I quickly volunteered to write another monograph for The Friends, tentatively entitled, **Burying General Brock: The History of Brock's Monuments**, due for publication in 1996.



CENTENNIALS, BICENTENNIALS . . .

The Niagara Historical Society's 100th Anniversary

This year the Niagara Historical Society, based in Niagara-on-the-Lake, is celebrating its 100th anniversary. While it is not the oldest historical society in Ontario or even here in the Niagara Peninsula (it was preceded by both Lundy's Lane [1888] and Thorold and Beaverdams [1894]), but it has made its influence felt throughout the province by its museum's distinguished collection of Loyalist artifacts and by its very ambitious publications programme.

To celebrate its centennial, the Society has arranged a series of events for members as well as non-members. The next one will be a walking tour of the Queenston Heights battlefield, which will take place on October 14. The Niagara Historical Museum also is involved in the centennial, having had three special exhibits during

the year, culminating with the travelling exhibit, "Discover the Titanic," which will be on display from October 7 to December 31.



**Janet Carnochan,
founder, Niagara
Historical Society**

The Society is also marking the bicentennial with two new publications. First, there is a new, revised "Museum Guide," sixteen pages in length, which features a brief but informative history of the Niagara Region; a history of the Museum and its four special collections; a Museum floor plan; a high quality map of the town illustrating the location of monuments, plaques and markers; and a list of all the Niagara Historical Society Publications.

Second, by mid-October the Niagara Historical Society expects to have available its most recent publication, Stones, Saints and Sinners. In that volume authors Fred Habermehl and Donald Combe guide the reader on walks through three major Niagara-on-the-Lake cemeteries, providing him with enlightening and entertaining information about the figures buried there.

The Niagara Historical Society is one of the few such societies which owns and operates its own museum. Memorial Hall, officially opened in 1907, was the first building in the province dedicated solely for use as a museum. As noted above, the collection is rich, but the building, which some have described as the Museum's largest artifact, is in need of extensive structural repair. For instance, the walls are buckling, and the buckling is quite visible even to the casual observer. Consequently, the Society is involved in collecting funds for the restoration of that building, the first phase of a plan to restore and upgrade the entire Museum. Any donations would be most welcome and income tax receipts will be issued (43 Castlereagh St., Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario L0S 1J0).

Happy Birthday, Niagara Historical Society!

Land Registry Bicentennial, 1795-1995

On August 7, 1995, Simcoe Park and Navy Hall in Niagara-on-the-Lake were the scene for the commemoration by the Province of the 200th anniversary of the establishment of the Land Registry System in what is now Ontario. The Lieutenant Governor visited the town, other dignitaries spoke, and the pioneering days of 1795 were invoked.

We are proud to note that Brian Narhi, a very active genealogical and local history researcher from St. Catharines (and a member of this Historical Society), had a very significant role in that whole project. Brian, who is currently residing in Toronto as he pursues his graduate studies at the University of Toronto, was given the assignment of

amassing documentation about the 55 land registry offices in the Province and writing a report on same for the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations, which is responsible for the land registry system. Tackling the job with his usual imagination and tenacity, Brian made some very interesting discoveries, among them the unearthing of a document that dated the establishment of the registry system much more exactly than had previously been possible.

The Col. John Butler Bicentenary Commemoration



Col. John Butler

Since late last November there have been regular monthly meetings to plan an appropriate commemoration of the May 1796 death of Col. John Butler, leader of Butler's Rangers during the American Revolutionary War.

The latest plans foresee: a day long history conference in Niagara-on-the-Lake on Saturday, May 11, 1996; a banquet that evening at the Lake Street Armouries in St. Catharines; and a "drum-head" religious service the following day at Lake Lodge on Lakeshore Rd. in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The next important steps will be to determine who will be the presenters in the history conference and where that event will take place. More information will be provided as it becomes available.

St. Catharines Bicentennial, 1796-1996

In August Jon Jouprien, on behalf of the Niagara Heritage Commemorative Committee, wrote to St. Catharines Mayor Al Unwin to advise him that a significant milestone in the history of this city is about to be reached. In the Archives of St. George's Church there is a land document dated February 17, 1796, which mentions "the church at St. Catharines." That is the first documented use of the term "St. Catharines" to refer to the little settlement on the banks of Twelve Mile Creek. Jouprien proposed that next February 17 the city mark the bicentennial of that document with appropriate commemorative ceremonies. Result: the suggestion caught the fancy of Mayor Unwin, who on September 21 chaired the first of a series of brain storming sessions to explore the most appropriate way to observe the bicentennial. Many more details of the commemorative activities should be available in time for our December newsletter.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY AUTHORS

We are happy to report that three books recently published by members of this Society are doing quite well.

Paul Hutchinson's Sincerely Lamented, excerpts of which were printed in the June issue of this newsletter, received favourable reviews in both the Standard and also the Downtowner. The first printing has been exhausted and a second printing is now selling briskly. (Call 227-2699 for further information.)

Marilyn Jackson and Gail Benjafield have completed their Who's Who in Heritage in Niagara, a compendium of the names, addresses, and phone numbers, as well as capsule descriptions, of heritage-related institutions all over the Peninsula. If you need ready reference to all of the museums, libraries, and historical societies of Niagara, as well as heritage-related government agencies, Marilyn's and Gail's book would be very useful. (Call 684-7618 for further information.)

Both books will be on sale at future meetings of the Historical Society.

And Bob Malcomson's book, The Battle of Queenston Heights, published in February of this year and discussed above on pages 4 through 6, is likewise selling very briskly and will be on sale this Thursday after his talk about the battle.

Our December newsletter, always devoted in large part to a summary of books about Niagara published during the previous twelve months, will have a lot more to say about these volumes as well as several other recently published volumes.

WANTED: ONE TREASURER

At the September meeting of the Historical Society executive, Avril Brass asked to be relieved of her duties as Treasurer of the Society. We very much regret that it has been necessary for Avril to stand down, but fortunately she will be able to continue as our membership chair. Now, which one of you would like to step forward and volunteer to serve as Treasurer? We really do need someone to fill the current vacancy, even if you can only serve until the election of the new executive at our Annual General Meeting in April. Do I hear any takers? (682-6053)

UPCOMING HERITAGE EVENTS:

Until November 12, St. Catharines Museum:

"Collingwood Skiffs & Side Launches," describing the different types of vessels built in the Collingwood ship yard. (984-8880)

Until January 7, 1996, Art Gallery of Hamilton:

A major exhibit of the works of Canadian painter Robert Whale, many of whose paintings depict Niagara Peninsula scenes (Niagara Falls, DeCew Falls) and people (William Hamilton Merritt). (905/527-6610)

September 27 to November 8, Niagara Historical Museum, N-O-T-L:

On seven successive Wednesday nights, nationally known heritage restoration architect Peter Stokes will give a series of illustrated talks entitled "From Cellar to Attic,"

dealing with heritage structures, their problems, and how to solve them. Admission charge. (468-3912).

October 5, 1995 (Thursday), 7:30 p.m., St. Catharines Public Library:

Author Bob Malcomson gives the Historical Society an illustrated talk about **"The Battle of Queenston Heights"** (682-6053)

October 7-December 31, Niagara Historical Society Museum, N-O-T-L.:

A travelling exhibit called "Discover the Titanic," retelling the always fascinating tale of the sinking of the "Unsinkable Ship." (468-3912)

October 8 (Sunday), 2:00 p.m., Welland Vale, St. Catharines:

Historian Peter Warwick and naturalist John Bacher lead a 90 minute walk along the old Welland Canal and 12 Mile Creek. Meet at the parking lot, Niagara College at Welland Vale.

October 14 (Saturday):

9:00a.m.-5:00p.m., Queenston Heights Restaurant, Queenston:

A Colloquium featuring papers on the history of circus posters, sponsored by the Mackenzie Heritage Printery, Queenston. Cost for the colloquium, lunch, and a tour of the Mackenzie Heritage Printery: \$30. Call John Burtiak, 688-5550, x3264.

1:00-3:00p.m., Queenston:

Author Bob Malcomson will lead a walking tour of the battlefield at Queenston Heights. The tour will take place both on the Heights and also down in Queenston Village. Free. Meet at the base of Brock's Monument (682-6053).

November 2, 1995 (Thursday), 7:30 p.m., St. Catharines Public Library:

Jim Campbell, Curator, Weir Foundation, Queenston, presents an illustrated talk about **"Art and Artists of Niagara."** (682-6053)

November 3 (Friday), 6:30 p.m., Niagara Falls:

The annual Lundy's Lane Historical Society dinner, at the Commissioners' Quarters, Victoria Park Restaurant, Niagara Falls. The featured speaker will be **Ron Dale, Superintendent of Niagara National Historic Sites.** Further information: 356-7926.

December 7, 1995 (Thursday), 7:30 p.m., St. Catharines Public Library:

Emeritus Professor Jim Love presents an illustrated talk about **"The History of the Grantham Academy/St. Catharines Collegiate"** (682-6053)

January 4, 1996 (Thursday), 7:30 p.m., St. Catharines Public Library:

Professor Alun Hughes gives an illustrated talk on **"The Mapping of St. Catharines"** (682-6053).



A drawing of the town of St. Catharines, incorporated in the masthead of the St. Catharines Constitutional in the 1850s and 1860s.