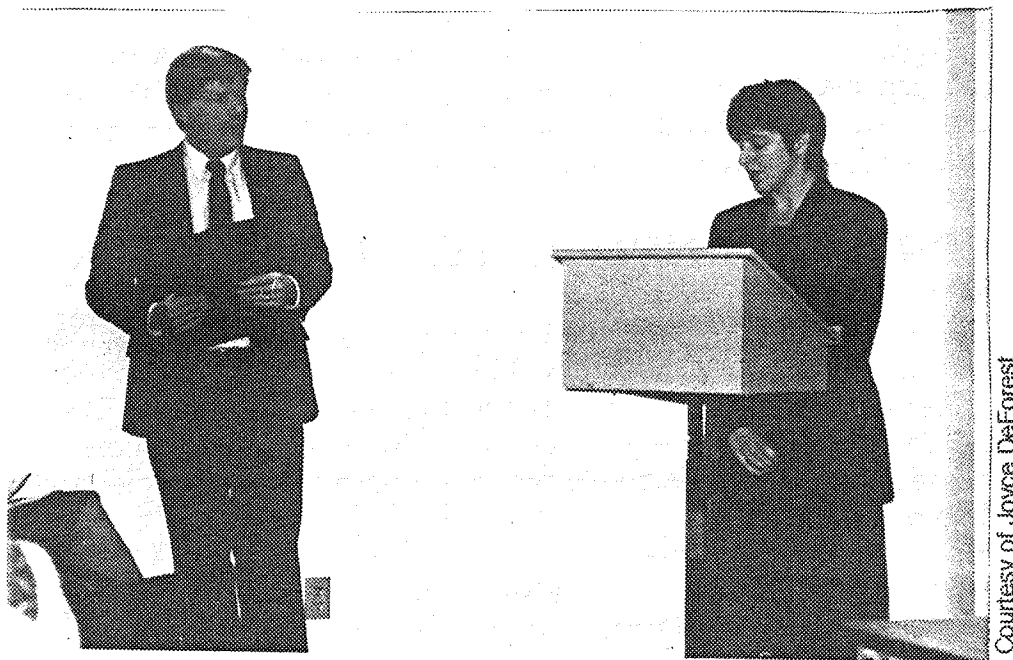


The Historical Society of St. Catharines **NEWSLETTER**

P.O. Box 23104, 124 Welland Ave., St. Catharines, ON L2R 7P6

905/682-6053

APRIL 1996



"FLIGHT TO FREEDOM"

We were rather stunned -- or "embarrassed by our own success," as one member put it -- on the night of February 2nd, when the Society's monthly meeting featured excerpts from *Flight to Freedom*, a PBS television documentary about the "Underground Railroad" that brought slaves to freedom in Canada. We were surprised and very gratified by a turnout of more than one hundred and fifty people, far in excess of any audience anyone can remember at any previous Historical Society meeting. Thank heavens we had been invited to have that meeting out at the St. Catharines Museum, because we could never have accommodated that large an audience at our usual meeting place in the St. Catharines Public Library.

The photo above was taken after the viewing of the video and shows Arden Phair (left), Senior Curator of Collections at the Museum, as he asked questions of Anne Spurling (right), the television producer from WXXI-TV in Rochester who was responsible for making the *Flight to Freedom* documentary. John Nicol's very interesting column in the *Standard* two days later, describing the meeting and emphasizing the proud role that St. Catharines had played in the "Underground Railroad," was the final element in what was a real triumph for the Society.

Many thanks to Ann Spurling for driving all the way over from Rochester to be with us for the evening, to moderator Arden Phair, and to Wilma Morrison of the Norval Johnson Black History Library in Niagara Falls, both of whom appeared in the video. They, along with Rosemary Sadlier of the Ontario Black History Society in Toronto, commented on the video and answered questions from the audience following the showing of *Flight*. Thanks also to Museum administrator Virginia Hatch-Stewart for inviting us to use the Museum for the evening and to staff members Martien Smit, Robert Graham and Drew Scott, who worked so hard to make us welcome and to accommodate our surprisingly large audience.

THE APRIL 4th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

It's that time of year again -- time for the Society's Annual General Meeting. The primary business of this year's meeting will be the election of a new Executive for the Society -- a president who will serve for two years, and a ten-member Executive, each of whose members will serve one year terms. A Nominating Committee consisting of Past Presidents John Burtiak, Alan Holden, and Sheila Wilson has met and offers the following slate of nominees:

President:	Wes Turner;
Vice-President:	Joyce DeForest;
Secretary:	Bill Stevens;
Treasurer:	Jennifer Patrick;
Councillors:	Donald Baird, Avril Brass,
	Paul Hutchinson, Fran
	Michalko; Jim Purdie;
	and Brenda Zadoroznij;
Past President:	Dennis Gannon.

Please note that nominations from the floor for candidates other than those listed above are very much in order. Such nominations may be made by members in good standing of the Society, provided that they are acceptable to the nominee and are supported by two other voting members of the Society.

Likewise, members of the Society may raise any questions they wish about Society affairs during this Annual General Meeting.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME

When you hear that it is time for the Society's annual general meeting, you also know that it is just about time for Society members to renew their memberships. Since the Society's membership year runs from April 30 to April 30, everyone's membership is about to expire. We encourage you to renew promptly, either in person after the A.G.M. or by mailing a renewal to the Society at P.O. Box 23104, 124 Welland Ave., St. Catharines, ON L2R 7P6. Memberships are \$10 for individuals, \$15 for couples.

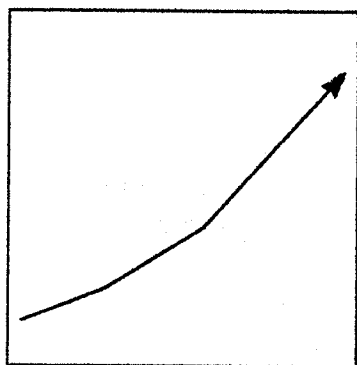
HAIL AND FAREWELL!

We are sorry to announce that two members of the Executive will be leaving: Cliff Baker and John Burtiak.

Cliff Baker has served on the Society executive for more than five years. He was especially valuable to the current president because of the very thorough job that he did for almost three years as the Society's representative on the Grand Opera House Subcommittee. Cliff, until recently the President of the Niagara Military Institute, has a long history of service to the community, particularly in the many military associations in this area. He will no doubt go on now to serve one or more of them as reliably and as capably as he has this Society. We will miss him on the Executive.

John Burtiak, currently our Past President, has served on the Historical Society executive for as long as anyone can remember, and he is leaving it now only because for some reason the Society's Constitution mandates that the Past President "sit out" a year when his term ends. John has contributed to the Society in a number of ways during the recent past -- he was a key player in the editing of the draft of Janis Barlow's Grand Opera House Research Report, he helped to produce both the large plastic sign and the brochure that are so useful in the Society's outreach activities, and he also helped draft a new Constitution for the Society (to be brought to the Society for approval later this year). While Past President John also gave two talks to the Society, once filling in at the last minute for a scheduled speaker who was unable to appear. Goodbye, John, and thanks! (We expect to see you back on the Executive next year!)

FINAL STATUS REPORT . . . AND GOOD-BYE



As I am about to end my three years as President of the Historical Society I can't resist the temptation to look back to try to get some idea of what has happened to the Society during that time. Let's take a look at some basic statistics:

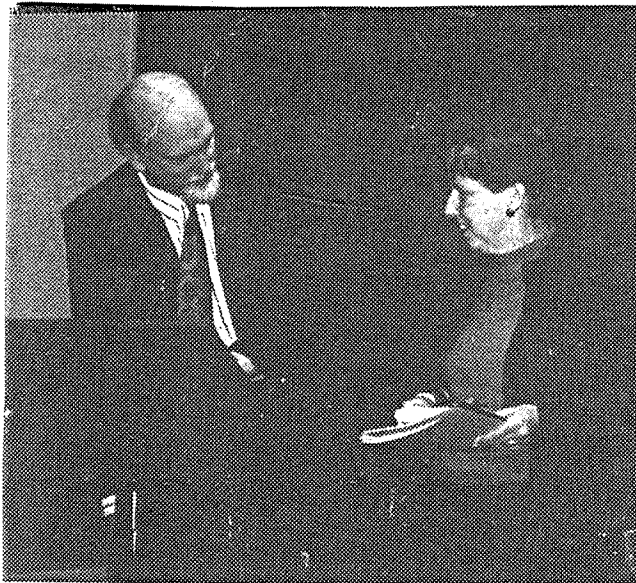
In April 1993 the Society had a balance of \$1,051 on its books; today the comparable figure is \$5,520. In 1993 our membership was 38; today the membership is a bit over 100. Up until 1993 the Society met six times each year; since 1993 we have increased our programme year to eight presentations. The average attendance at our meetings in 1992-93 was about 30; the average attendance in 1995-96 has been 64.

Word about the Society has been getting out more and more. The *Standard* felt that four of the 24 meetings in the last three years were significant enough to merit coverage in its pages (the talks by Bill Noble, Owen Thomas, Carmela Patrias, and the *Flight to Freedom* video documentary). In addition, the paper devoted two or three articles to the research involved in producing the Society's Grand Opera House

Research Report, culminating in a full page story about its findings when the report was published last year.

That Opera House report was itself the first publication by this Society since 1984 -- unless you want to count our three *St. Catharines Historical Calendars*. Those calendars were a new venture that not only subtly reminded people of our local heritage as the months passed, but also significantly improved the Society's financial condition to the tune of about \$2,000. (Three Provincial Heritage grants totalling \$2800 which we received plus the increase in our membership fees are two other reasons for our present secure financial status.)

We have had a series of special events outside of our regular Thursday night meetings: a walking tour of Victoria Lawn Cemetery in June 1993, a guided tour of Merriton in October 1994 (both courtesy of Arden Phair), a series of walking tours of downtown St. Catharines last summer, and a bus trip to Hamilton last November. (Those are in addition to the annual Oille Potting Ceremony each May and the Merritt Birthday Commemoration each July).



The Society's very tall president adjusts the lectern downward to suit our normal-sized speaker, Margaret Glassford, during the Society's March meeting.

Courtesy of Joyce DeForest

So, I think the past three years have been a period of growth for the Society. But there is certainly still a lot more to do. Simply compare the size of our membership with that of the Thorold and Beaverdams Historical Society: we have 100-plus members in a city of 130,000; they have about the same number of members in a community of only about 16,000! Yes, there is still a **lot** of growing for our Society to do!

Thanks to all of those who have made these past three years a time of progress for the Society. For myself, I want to say that it has been a privilege to serve as the Society's president. It has been an experience that I have enjoyed tremendously. Now that my time as president is about to expire, I know I'm going to miss the job, but if I live long enough maybe I can have another try at it a decade or two.

Frankly, I can hardly wait. **It's been great fun! Thank you!**

Meanwhile, our new president and his enthusiastic, hard-working executive are going to lead the Historical Society of St. Catharines into a period of further progress. Your turn, Wes!

Dennis Burns

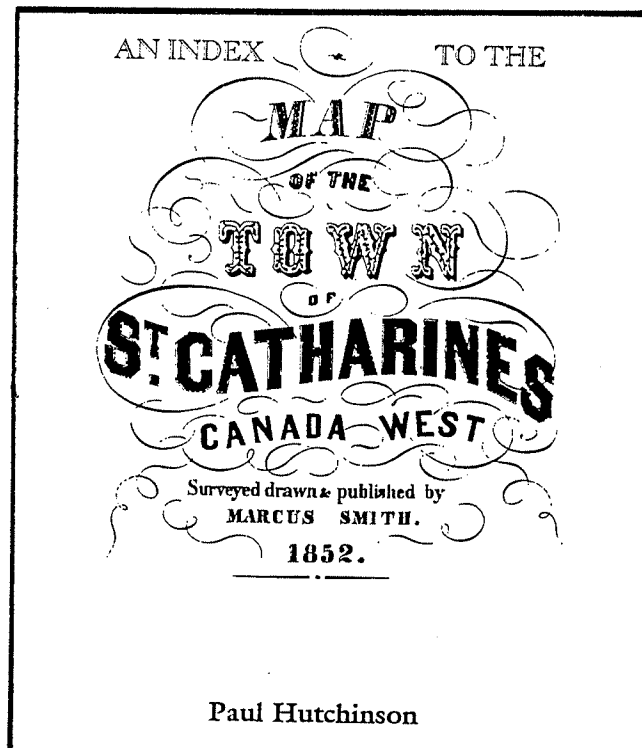
HISTORICAL SOCIETY AUTHORS II

In our October 1995 newsletter we devoted an article to some of the books written in the past year or so by authors who are also members of this Historical Society. We unaccountably failed to mention at that time two helpful works produced by long-time Society member Colin Duquemin, and subsequently Paul Hutchinson has produced another small but very useful volume (his third in as many years).

Colin Duquemin's *Driver's Guide Series*:

In 1994 Colin Duquemin published two slim volumes dedicated to helping visitors to Niagara (not to mention residents of Niagara) to find their way to local historic sites. First came **The Driver's Guide to the Welland Canal**, followed not too long afterward by **The Driver's Guide to the Niagara Battlefields in the War of 1812-1814**. Each volume is approximately 30 pages long, is illustrated with photos, drawings, and maps, and provides travellers with useful information about historic sites worth visiting in this area along with detailed instructions on how to find them. The writing of these volumes perhaps originated in the very shrewd insight that the most vivid way to relive history can be to visit the sites where the events took place. With these volumes in hand, such visits will be more profitable and more efficiently carried out (\$13.95 per volume, available from the author/Norman Enterprises at 685-8887).

Paul Hutchinson's *Index to the Marcus Smith Map, 1852*:



Just in time for the Society's January meeting on "The Mapping of St. Catharines" Paul Hutchinson produced this useful tool to help local historians and genealogists draw the maximum benefit from the beautifully drawn and fact-filled **Map of the Town of St. Catharines Canada West**, published in 1852 by surveyor/cartographer Marcus Smith. It's fair to say that for serious researchers Paul's index is invaluable in finding, for example, all the properties owned by your ancestors in St. Catharines at the middle of the last century. (Price: \$6 for the index, \$2 for the map, available from the author/Slabtown Press at 227-2699).

COL. JOHN BUTLER BICENTENARY, 1796-1996



**Col. John Butler
(1729-1796)**

Colonel John Butler was the leader of Butler's Rangers, who fought for the Crown against the rebels during the American Revolution. After the Revolution Butler and his men moved across the Niagara River and helped found Upper Canada (Ontario). He died on May 12, 1796, in Niagara-on-the-Lake (called Butlersburg in its earliest days). The bicentenary of Colonel Butler's death is going to be marked in both St. Catharines and Niagara-on-the-Lake on the weekend of May 11-12, 1996.

Saturday, May 11, will feature an international conference on Butler and his times, featuring scholarly papers presented by six Canadian and American experts on the era of Butler and the Rangers. This conference will be held in Niagara-on-the-Lake, the place which Butler chose for his home in Upper Canada.

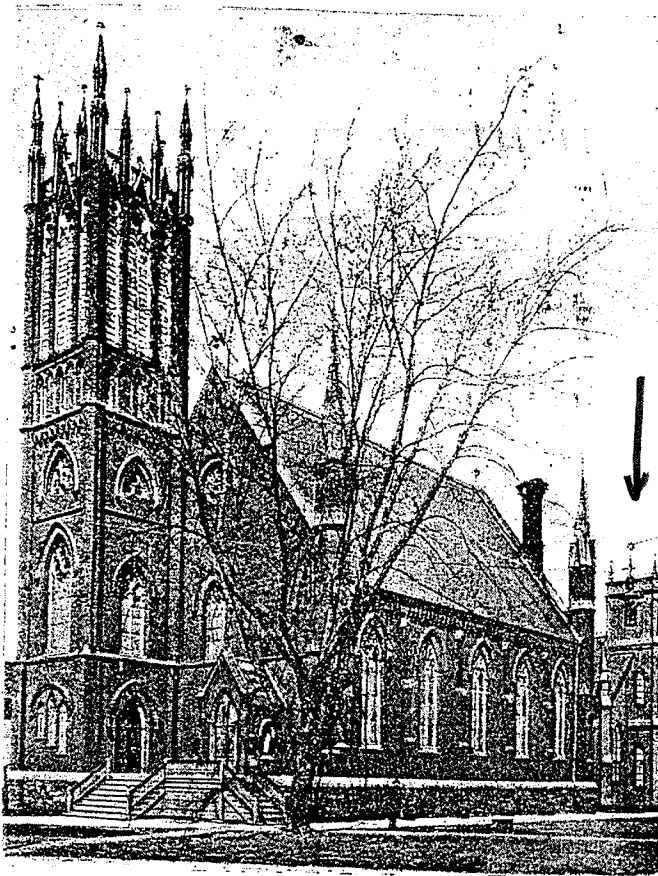
On the evening of that same day there will be The Butler Bicentenary Banquet, hosted by The Lincoln and Welland Regiment at the Lake St. Armoury in St. Catharines. This banquet will be preceded by the Commanding Officer's Reception. The honoured guest and feature speaker at the banquet will be the Honourable Gilbert Parent, speaker of the House of Commons.

At 10:00 a.m. on Sunday morning Major The Reverend Charles Mitchell CD of the Lincoln and Welland Regiment will conduct a memorial Drum Head Church Service at Butler's Burying Ground in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Present at the service will be a company of Butler's Rangers re-enactors garbed in authentic uniforms of Butler's time, as well as the Lincoln and Welland Regimental Band and a choir made up of pupils from the Colonel John Butler School in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Following the Drum Head Church Service, the Butler's Rangers re-enactors will parade from the Burying Ground to the Court House in downtown Niagara-on-the-Lake, where the Lord Mayor will grant them the freedom of the town. The parade will then continue to Fort George, where there will be an exchange of artillery salutes fired between Fort George and Fort Niagara across the river. An afternoon of activities at the Fort will follow.

The general public is cordially invited to participate in **all** these events -- the conference and banquet on Saturday and the outdoor events on Sunday. For further details (speakers, subjects, locations, admission prices, etc.) please call Centenary coordinator Edward Scott at 732-2274.

WELLAND AVENUE UNITED CHURCH 'S 125TH



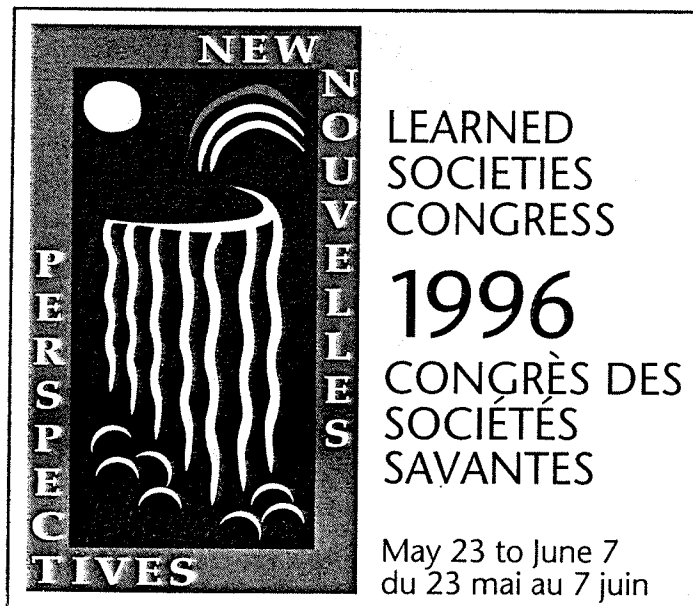
In this early 20th century post card we see the familiar red brick Welland Ave. United Church and, behind it, the little frame church that originally served that congregation.

Did you know that 1996 marks the 125th anniversary of the Welland Avenue United Church? In December 1870 the Official Board of the St. Paul Street Methodist Church met to consider the advisability of establishing a new Methodist church "in the suburbs of the town." The Board members approved the idea and agreed that this suburban church should be in the neighbourhood of Welland Avenue. The St. Paul Street congregation agreed, in February a board of trustees was formed for the new church, it in turn established a building committee which purchased, land at the corner of Welland Avenue and Henry Street. The first church built there was a frame church completed in late 1871. The fine brick church that we know today is actually the second on that site. When it was decided to build it just six years later, the original frame church was simply moved about a half block north on Henry Street to make way for the new edifice. (That same 1871 building still exists today, recognizable by its distinctive Gothic windows, standing in yet another location, nearly in the middle of the block bounded by Henry, Welland, Lake and Elizabeth streets. Now it's a gym!)

Church member Prof. Sybil Wilson of Brock University tells us that one of the church's anniversary activities involves producing a sort of Book of Memories, what she calls "a modest 'homemade' production that would feature stories of kindness, significance by old time members of the congregation." This project needs volunteers to help find and then tape record conversations with elder members of the Welland Avenue United congregation. Anyone interested in helping with this worthy project can contact Prof. Wilson by phoning her at work at 688-5550, x3350, or at home at 227-2652.

Meanwhile, the Society wishes Welland Avenue United Church a very happy 125th birthday. We will take care to let our readers know of any other special events planned to mark this special year in the life of that distinguished institution.

THE LEARNED SOCIETIES COME TO ST. CATHARINES

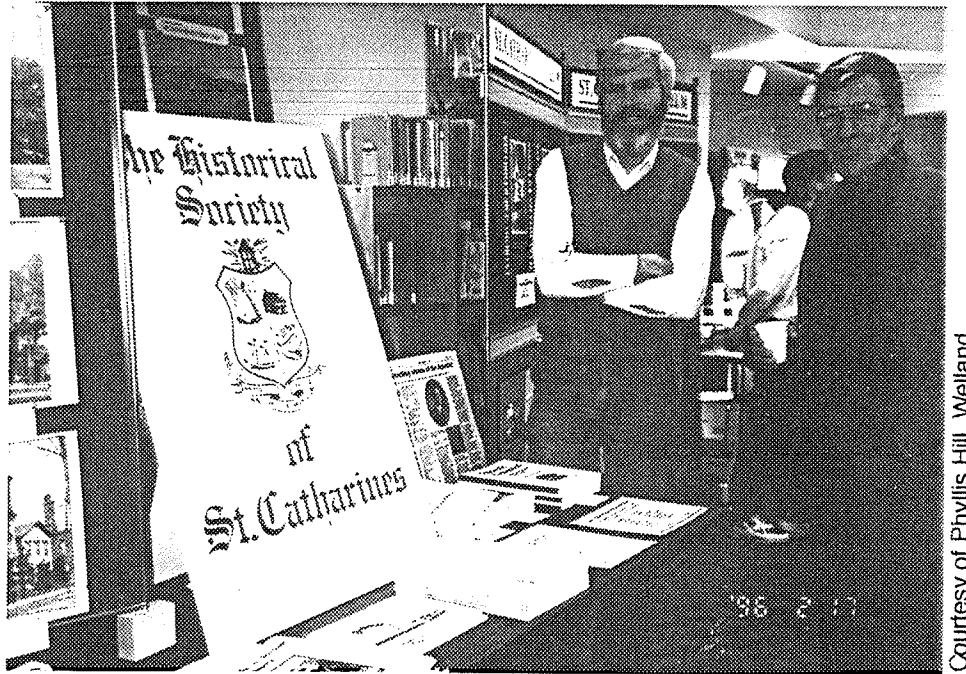


This spring Brock University is honoured to host the 75th annual meeting of the Learned Societies of Canada, to be held there from Thursday, May 23 through Friday, June 7. This is a feather in the cap of the University since it is the first time that this gathering has been held at Brock in its 30-plus years of existence. What this means to the community at large is that we have the opportunity to attend a wide variety of presentations on all sorts of scholarly activities. Perhaps of most interest to Historical Society members will be the many meetings scheduled under the auspices of the Canadian Historical Association (CHA) from Thursday, May 30 to Sunday, June 2.

Society Vice-President Wes Turner, Professor of History at Brock and the coordinator of the CHA activities during the Learned Societies Conference, wants members of the Historical Society to know that **all** of the Learned Societies/CHA meetings may be attended by the general public (meaning us). He advises that for further information about the exact subjects, times and places of the meetings, and for information about what admission fees, if any, will be charged to attend them, we can phone the Learned Societies Conference office at Brock at 688-5550, x4452.

Professor Turner particularly mentioned two Distinguished Speakers Sessions: on Thursday, May 30, from 7-10:00 p.m., Prof. Cornelius Jaenen of the University of Ottawa offers a personal memoir entitled "**Identity, Citizenship, and Democracy: A Personal Experience**" (there will be a small admission charge). On Friday, May 31, from 5-7:00 p.m., Alice Kessler-Harris, Professor of History at Rutgers University, will talk about "**Economic Citizenship for Women**"; after her talk Pierre Savard of the University of Ottawa will talk about **the 1955 Boy Scout World Jamboree held in Niagara-on-the-Lake** (no admission charge).

Likely to interest local history buffs are a couple of talks about **the Welland Canal and the Soo Locks at Sault Ste. Marie**, scheduled for Friday morning, May 31, followed by **a three hour afternoon bus tour of points along the Welland Canal**, led by Society members Rob Taylor and Roberta Styran. Again, for further details please call the telephone number noted above. See you at the conference?



Society executive members Paul Hutchinson (left) and Jim Purdie (right) are shown manning the Society's display at this year's Niagara Heritage Showcase at the Fonthill Public Library on February 17th.

UPCOMING HISTORICAL SOCIETY EVENTS:

General Meetings

On **Thursday, April 4**, architect Norman Macdonald, partner in the firm of Macdonald & Zuberec and former president of this Society, will give an illustrated lecture on "**The History of Old Glenridge**";

On **Thursday, May 2**, Pleasance Crawford of Toronto will talk about "**Period Gardens in 19th Century St. Catharines**."

Both those talks will take place at 7:30 p.m. in the Mills Room of the St. Catharines Public Library.

The Oille Geranium Potting Ceremony

On Saturday, May 4, at 11:00 a.m., the Society will hold its annual geranium potting ceremony at the Oille Fountain, corner of James and King streets downtown. This half hour ceremony (now in its twentieth year) honours the memory of the multi-talented Lucius Oille, medical doctor, mayor, and father of our water works system. In so doing, the Society honours the wish of Dr. Oille, who, according to legend, is supposed to have stipulated that each year a geranium be planted in the urn atop the fountain, in commemoration of his donation of the fountain.

Merritt Birthday Commemoration

The Society will celebrate the annual William Hamilton Merritt Birthday Anniversary at his statue, corner of McGuire and St. Paul Streets, sometime during the first week of July. Final details regarding the date and time of that event will be announced in our June newsletter, and on the *Standard's* "People Page."

OTHER UPCOMING HERITAGE EVENTS:

- May 4 (Sat.), 8:30a.m.-5:30p.m.:** a **Welland Canal Community bus and walking tour of Allanburg and Port Robinson**, sponsored by the Canadian Canal Society (\$30 for the tour, including lunch; it's a "members only" event, but membership is only \$10). Only 47 seats available. (Further details: John Burtiak: 688-5550, x3264)
- May 11-12 (Sat./Sun.), all day:** **The Colonel John Butler Bicentenary**, marking the 200th anniversary of the death of Col. Butler, leader of Butler's Rangers. (For details, see above, page 6, or call Ed Scott at 732-2274)
- May 25 (Saturday):** a trip to Auburn, New York, for the annual pilgrimage to the grave of Harriet Tubman, Black "conductor" on the Underground Railroad who led hundreds of slaves to freedom in St. Catharines. After the Civil War she moved back to the United States and lived out her life in Auburn, just south of Syracuse. A group of ten people (led by Arden Phair of the Museum) plan to drive over to Auburn for the event. It will be a **l o n g** day -- a four hour drive over, perhaps six hours in Auburn visiting the Tubman grave site and her home (now a museum), as well as other sites of interest in the town, and a four hour drive back to St. Catharines. If you would like to come along, please call 682-6053 for further details regarding costs and times of departure and return.
- May 30-June 2 (Thurs.-Sun.), Brock University:** The 75th annual conference of the Canadian Historical Association, part of the Canadian Learned Societies gathering. (See above, page 8.)
- June 1 (Saturday), 10a.m.-4p.m.:** the annual **Niagara-on-the-Lake House Tour**, sponsored by the Niagara Foundation. For further information, write the Foundation at Box 790, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario L0S 1J0, or call the N-O-T-L Chamber of Commerce, 468-4263.
- June 8 (Saturday), 8:30a.m.-5:00p.m.:** the Lundy's Lane Historical Society sponsors a bus tour to visit several museums and historic sites in Hamilton. (Further information: 356-7926).
- June 8 (Saturday), 11:00a.m.-5p.m.:** The annual **historic cruise on the Niagara River**, sponsored by Niagara College, with historical commentary by Brock University history professor Wes Turner, and a ship-board lunch. The ship boards at 10:30 a.m. (There is also a dinner cruise from 8p.m. to midnight, without the historical commentary.) For further details, call Shirley Tomovic at Niagara College, 735-2211, x7521.
- June 22 (Saturday), 10a.m.-4p.m.:** the **Niagara Conservancy Garden Tour**, Niagara-on-the-Lake. For further information, call 468-3443 or write to the Conservancy at Box 1582, Niagara-on-the-Lake L0S 1J0.
- June 30 (Sunday), 2:30 p.m.:** at Beavercreeks United Church, the Rev. John Bedell conducts a service impersonating "Mr. John Wesley." This is part of the continuing **commemoration of the bicentennial of Methodism in the Thorold area**. Thorold's official historian, Esther Summers, will have a display about the history of the early churches along the Niagara Frontier.