

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

P.O. Box 23104, 124 Welland Ave., St. Catharines, ON L2R 7P6 905/682-6053

MAY 1997

## **ON THE ROAD AGAIN!**

The Historical Society has already finalized its plans for its annual bus trip. In our last newsletter we asked for suggestions from our members about places they would like to go on our next trip. Some said Buffalo. Some said Toronto. Some said Hamilton . . . and the winner is . . . TORONTO!

On Saturday, June 28, our bus will be leaving from the Market Square at 8:30 a.m. for a 10:00 a.m. arrival at Casa Loma and Spadina, two magnificent Toronto mansions built very much on the grand scale, situated adjacent to one another on a hill overlooking downtown Toronto. (There is a St. Catharines connection here, too -- in the mid-1920s Sir Henry Pellat, builder of Casa Loma, married Catharine Welland Merritt, grand-daughter of William Hamilton Merritt.)

After lunch, the afternoon will be spent touring the legislative buildings at Queen's Park. Built in a flamboyant neo-romanesque style and opened in 1892, the "Pink Palace" (so-named for the reddish-pink stone from which it is constructed) is a lavish example of a public building in the grand style, before the age of down-sizing.

For further information and to order tickets for this full day of activities -- bus to and from Toronto, entrance and tours at the two mansions and the legislature -- you may call 682-6053.



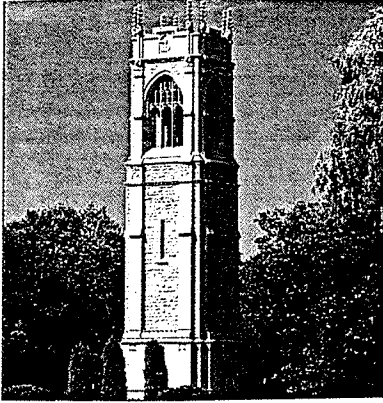
Ontario Legislature, Queen's Park



Casa Loma

## ***OTHER HISTORICAL SOCIETY EVENTS***

### **Victoria Lawn Cemetery Walking Tour, May 4, 2:00 p.m.**



As a way of marking the centenary in mid-May of the re-naming of the former St. Catharines Cemetery as "Victoria Lawn Cemetery," the Historical Society will sponsor a walking tour of the cemetery grounds. The word has gone out widely this year, so we expect a good turnout. The tour will be conducted by Bill Stevens, who just a few days before will have given an illustrated talk at our regular May meeting about the score of cemeteries that have served the St. Catharines area over the past two hundred years.

### **The Oille Geranium Potting Ceremony, May 10:**

On Saturday, May 10, at 11:30 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 twenty-first 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 tradition, stipulated that each year a geranium be planted in the urn atop the fountain, in commemoration of his donation of the fountain.

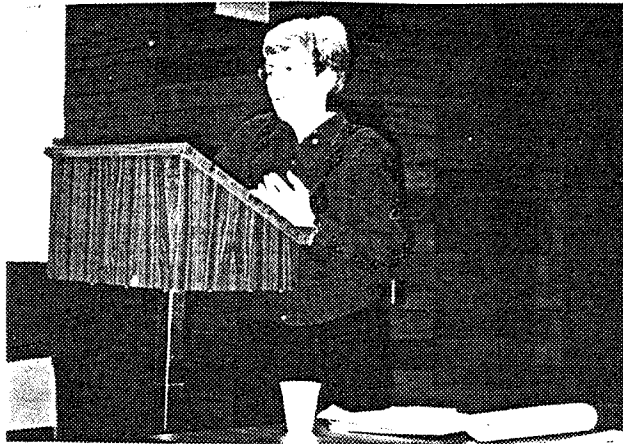
### **Merritt Birthday Commemoration, July 5, 9:30 a.m.**

The Society will celebrate the annual William Hamilton Merritt Birthday Anniversary at his statue, corner of McGuire and St. Paul Streets, at 9:30 a.m. on the morning of Saturday, July 5. Be present to honour the memory of the man responsible for so much of what St. Catharines is today.

### **Downtown Walking Tours: (July 5, 12, 19, 26, August 2 & 9, 10:00 a.m.)**

Finally, for the third year in a row, the Historical Society and the St. Catharines Downtown Association will be co-sponsoring Saturday morning walking tours of downtown St. Catharines. Lasting anywhere from 90 minutes to two hours, the tours will begin at "The Rockpile," corner of St. Paul and Ontario streets, and will cover the same territory as in previous years -- portions of Ontario-King-Queen-Church-James, focusing on the architecture and the history of the buildings we pass. These walks are free of charge and are open to everyone.

## RECENT HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETINGS

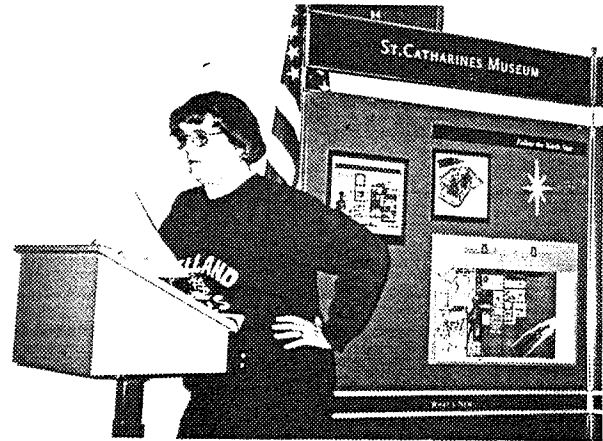
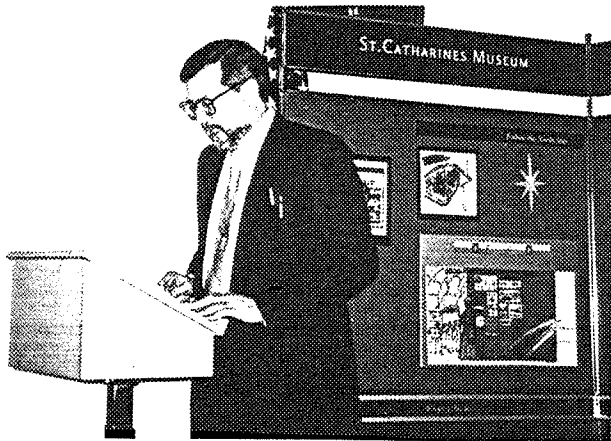


Nancy Butler talking about three escaped slaves in business in St. Catharines, at our February meeting.



Hannah Stanwick talking about "Did St. Catharines Miss the Boat?" at our January meeting.

Photos by Joyce DeForest



Robert Taylor and Roberta Styran talking about "Crossing The Ditch: Bridges Over the Welland Canal," at our March meeting.

## THE NEW EXECUTIVE

At its April 4th Annual General Meeting, the Historical Society chose the following Executive for 1997-98:

President  
Vice-President  
Treasurer (Membership)  
Secretary  
Past President  
Directors:

Wesley Turner  
Joyce DeForest  
Avril Brass  
Bill Stevens  
Dennis Gannon  
John Burtiak  
Paul Hutchinson  
Jim Purdie  
Brenda Zadaroznij

## VICTORIA DAY, 1859

How do you plan to honour the memory of Queen Victoria this year? You know, Monday, May 19, the third Monday in May -- Victoria Day, the "Civic Holiday" -- whatever you want to call it. "Nothing special," you say? A good day to open up the cottage for the season? Well, the day was VERY special back in the mid-nineteenth century. The following is a very detailed description of the celebration of the Queen's birthday on Tuesday, May 24, 1859, reprinted from the *Semi-Weekly Post*, St. Catharines, May 27, 1859, page 2: I wonder if your great-grand parents were there?

### "The Queen's Birthday.

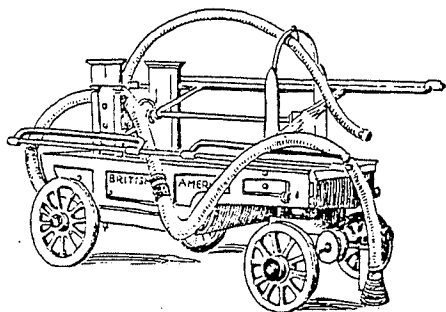
... the celebration in St. Catharines, was well worthy of the men who managed it, ... Just as the clock struck six in the morning the Artillery under the management of Henry Mittleberger, Esq., fired the first gun, soon followed by another and another, until a royal salute told all the inhabitants, whom it was possible to wake up at that hour -- that the Queen's birth day had again arrived. The interval between that time and 9 o'clock was filled up by the occasional discharge of small arms, and the explosion of the crackers in an incessant rattle, amidst which the preparations for the great and crowning effort,

#### The Fireman's Procession,

were made and resulted in the most complete success. The rendezvous was the Town Hall<sup>1</sup>, and at the hour appointed half past 9, the different companies took their places, and headed by the Port Dalhousie Band, proceeded through the streets, ... When it is considered that the display made by the firemen on this occasion, was their own work, planned and executed at their own expense, without any aid from any quarter -- it reflects the highest credit on them as a body. Their march thro' the town was witnessed with surprise and pleasure by every body; and the gentlemen who had seen such processions in different parts of the United States and Canada, asserted they had never seen it surpassed. As it came down the main street [St. Paul St.] the view was picturesque and imposing; First came the Chief Engineer and his assistant dressed in their modest but neat uniform -- then the Band, and immediately after the 'Protection' Hook and Ladder Company followed -- Their waggon tastefully decorated, and bearing the motto, 'Where duty calls we fly to save,' was drawn by four horses, the men clad in their light blue frock coats, ornamented with red braid and light caps followed in regular order -- two abreast.

Then came the 'Rollison' Hose Company dressed in black pants white shirts and black hats, very conveniently dispensing with any other encumbrance in the shape of clothing but drawing by the

aid of variegated ropes their own Hose Cart, profusely decorated with flowers, showing that even on this occasion they needed no help to do their duty -- their motto was 'First on duty--last to leave.'



Fire apparatus of the 1850s

After them came the 'Blues'---the Union Engine company--- the dark blue jackets and pantaloons of the Company, trimmed with gold lace, and their new caps made of different colored patent leather, gave them a rich and elegant appearance--on the front of their caps appeared the motto 'No Surrender' and their engine drawn by a fine span of black horses was elegantly adorned and bore the motto -- 'Always ready -- ever willing to subdue.'

Last but not least came the old "Reds," clothed in loose red jackets or smocks, and black pantaloons, and white hard leather hats with large brims, their uniform was all new and looked well -- their Engine the 'Rescue' was decorated, and when we say it was done under the superintendence of 'Frieseman' we need say no more. There was a new feature however in the decoration, that requires notice -- on the deck of the Engine --- (which is a piano)--- was placed an Ottoman, surmounted by a magnificent crown -- under the shade of which stood two pretty little girls -- daughters of Mr. Frieseman-- clad in pure white-- their heads were adorned with a wreath from which flowed a gauze veil, which enshrouded their whole persons and as they stood on the engine holding by the ottoman, they formed an interesting attraction to all who saw the procession. The question was asked by many -- what is the meaning of placing the little girls there, but taken in connection with the motto of the Company, 'Onward to save' and the fact that many such children have been saved from the destroying element by firemen, the appropriateness of the device is apparent -- the Rescue Engine was drawn by two horses.

The whole procession numbered about one hundred and fifty men, and we think we are safe in the asserting, that a finer body was never paraded in any town of the same size. It was very difficult to say which Company looked the best -- they were all admirable; and as we stepped along the sidewalk we felt proud of the men, and proud of the occasion that brought them out. As the procession reached the tank on the main street, at the junction of Ontario, it assumed a circular form, and came to a halt with the Chief Engineer, his assistant, and the Band in the centre. The chief then proposed three cheers for the Queen -- which were given heartily, the Band playing God save the Queen; he then proposed three for the Governor General -- also given lustily -- the Band playing the 'British Grenadiers' -- Capt. Frieseman of the Rescue then stepped forward and proposed three for the Chief Engineer -- which met with a response that told well for the popularity of that officer -- and the procession again resumed its course. At this point we may add the St. Catharines Band at the special request of Capt. Frieseman and his company, joined the procession taking their places at the head of that Company and contributed by their excellent music to the animation of the march until it reached the Town Hall, where they separated and the several companies wended their way to recruit their physical strength by partaking of the refreshments prepared for them.

About twelve o'clock the 5th Lincoln mustered on the Academy ground,<sup>2</sup> . . . The Rifle Company of Col. Richard A. Clarke was on the parade ground, and added materially in giving the salute by firing a **feu de joie** in excellent style -- Capt. Mittleberger's Artillery filling up the intervals with their heavy guns. Major Bate's Cavalry was also on the ground, but for some reason 'evaporated before the salute was given' . . . After the salute was given Col. Macdonald addressed the regiment -- complimented them upon their appearance and their military order -- spoke with animation of the delight he experienced in commanding such a body of men -- congratulated the country upon the security which every man must feel, that looked upon the array presented on that occasion and said that while Canada possessed such defenses, the integrity of the Empire was safe. He then dismissed them and the several Companies marched to their 'respective barracks' . . .

In the afternoon, William Street became the scene of much excitement, and a large concourse of people came together to see the old fashioned sports of 'climbing the greasy pole, chasing the pig and running the wheelbarrow race performed. The excitement continued until after six o'clock and produced much merriment among the crowd. The pole particularly, on the top of which was placed a new hat, the reward of the person who should reach it, appeared to be an object of regard with several competitors, judging from the manner in which they embraced it, and the additional stimulant of two dollars added to the hat, made their efforts incessant. The prize was at last won by a small boy named Robinson who carried it off in triumph. . . .



Home of Henry Mittleberger

As the shades of evening deepened, the demonstration appeared to revive, and Illuminations, Fire works and Bonfires might be seen in every part of the town. The illuminations although not general, had very pleasant effect, and some of them were really magnificent. Mr. Henry Mittleberger as usual, had his place<sup>3</sup> enlightened by a

number of Chinese lamps, but this time with admirable taste he had them suspended directly over his house, in the shape of a V, which might be seen from almost all parts of the town. Mr. Richard Miller also, had his garden beautifully ornamented, for almost every tree in it bore shining fruit, and Mr. John F. Mittleberger added to the effect by illuminating his garden in front of his house.<sup>4</sup> On the main street the great object of interest was the store of Mr. Colver, which presented an appearance really beautiful. The two rows of windows above his store were illuminated, and between the windows the initials V.R. and her majesty's image was traced with evergreens -- on top of the building just at the front was the ensign of St. George, the outlines of which were made visible, by a large and variegated lamp that hung beneath it. -- The effect was grand and truly creditable to the owner.

The firemen concluded the whole affair by a Ball in the Town Hall, on a grand scale. There was a large company present; -- the Hall being crowded, and the dance was kept up until the next morning. The strictest order and decorum prevailed through the whole night, . . .

On the whole the Queen's birthday in St. Catharines was an occasion of much pleasure to the people of St. Catharines, and passed off with as little to regret as could well be expected -- there was no accident -- no person hurt that we are aware of -- there was some little quarrelling and a few fights -- but as those little episodes appear to afford enjoyment to the parties engaged in them, we don't think we should put them up as an offset to the general festivities of the day.

### ' GOD SAVE THE QUEEN. '

1. The oldest part of the building now known as the Old Courthouse, on King Street, next to the St. Catharines Market Square.
2. Likely an open space behind today's Multicultural Centre (the former Robertson School), 85 Church Street. By the early 1870s that area became the site of a drill shed used for militia drilling.
3. The Mittleberger-Wright house, which from c.1842 to 1971 stood at the southwest corner of James and Duke Streets.
4. This house still stands, now numbered 88 Ontario Street. In the late 1850s its property extended all the way from today's St. Catharines Club to the corner of Ontario and Salina streets.

## THE LATEST ON WATSON

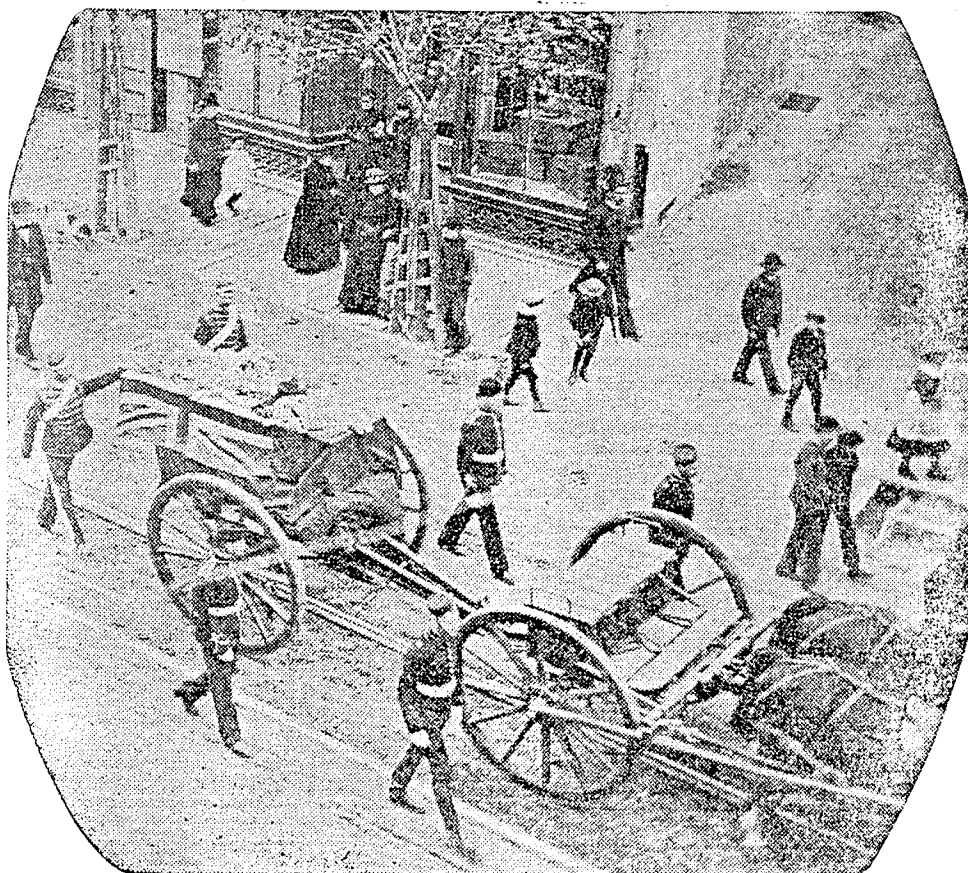
The month of May is a time for commemorating not only Mayor Lucius Oille and Queen Victoria (see above), but it is also a time when we might think of one of the most prominently "memorialized" persons in all our history.

It was on May 12, 1885, that a young man named Alexander Watson was mortally wounded while participating in the Federal government's effort to suppress Louis Riel and the Northwest Rebellion. Three days later he died, and soon thereafter his body was returned to his home town and buried in Victoria Lawn Cemetery.

Slightly more than a year later, in September 1886, Watson was further honoured by a grand celebration of his memory, capped by the dedication of a statue in his honour on the grounds of the City Hall, where it still stands today.

We are happy now to be able to show you a couple of very rare, long forgotten photos. last published in the *Standard* on January 18, 1936. One of them shows a portrait of Alexander Watson, taken in Winnipeg in the year of his death. The other shows his funeral cortege proceeding down Ontario Street, at about the place where Peninsula Press is located today. These offer two very "new" perspectives on the story of Private Alexander Watson.

Thanks to Society member Eleanor Shaw, who donated this clipping, and many others of like interest, to our newsletter editor following a recent Society meeting.





## OTHER UPCOMING HERITAGE EVENTS

### **May 10 (Saturday), Downtown St. Catharines, all day:**

A day of events sponsored by the *Downtowner* centring on the Market Square: Barbara Gosen and Howard Engel do walking tours and the Historical Society has its annual Oille Fountain potting ceremony (641-1984).

### **May 15 (Thursday), 7:30 p.m.:**

Inge Saczkowski, Local History Librarian at the Niagara Falls Public Library, gives an illustrated talk entitled "**Jilted: Niagara's Broken Promises of Greatness**," about some of the grandiose schemes to make Niagara Falls a "world class city." (At the Niagara Historical Museum, 43 Castlereagh St., NOTL; 682-6053)

### **May 31 (Saturday)**

**10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.:** The Grimsby Historical Society will be holding its annual Historic House Tour. Featured will be five homes, dating from 1806 to 1989. Tickets: \$12 per person. (905/945-9518)

### **May 31 (Saturday)**

**11 a.m.-5:00 p.m.:** The annual cruise on the tall ship *Empire Sandy* from Port Weller up the Niagara River, sponsored by Niagara College, with historical commentary by Brock University History Professor Wes Turner, and a ship-board lunch, all for \$79 (735-2211, x7521).

**8 p.m.-12 midnight:** An evening cruise with dinner and dancing on the tall ship *Empire Sandy*, sponsored by Niagara College, \$59. (735-2211, x7521).

### **June 7 (Saturday)**

**10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.:** The annual Niagara-on-the-Lake House Tour. Ten of the historic houses of Niagara-on-the-Lake are open for tours. Tickets: \$17.50 (Write the Niagara Foundation, Box 790, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario L0S 1J0).

### **June 4 (Wednesday), 3:30 p.m.:**

The Niagara Historical Society formally re-opens its Museum after a year and more of renovation for its 1875 and 1906 component buildings. People in period costume welcome. (43 Castlereagh St., NOTL)

### **June 7 (Saturday), 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.**

A flea market, sponsored by the Thorold and Beaverdams Historical Society, as a fund raiser for the Thorold Museum. In Chestnut Hall, at Vine and Ormond streets, next to the Thorold Library. For further information, please call Mary Mosher at 227-0514 or Marg Lamb at 227-1632.

### **June 14 (Saturday), all day:**

The Lundy's Lane Historical Society's **annual spring bus trip this year goes to the Elbert Hubbard /Roycrofters Museum in East Aurora, New York, long the centre of an arts and crafts movement**, home to a group of artisans who produced elegantly crafted books, silverware, copperware, and furniture. For further information: 356-7926.

### **June 21 (Saturday)**

**10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.:** The Niagara on the Lake Conservancy sponsors its annual Garden Tour in Niagara-on-the-Lake. A variety of gardens, large and small, have been selected for this year's tour. Cost: \$12 per person. Tickets are to be purchased beforehand by writing the Niagara Conservancy at P.O. Box 1582, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario L0S 1J0. (905/468-3328)

### **July 13 (Sunday), 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.:**

On Sunday, July 13, the Thorold and Beaverdams Historical Society will sponsor its first **Thorold Garden Tour**. Six Thoroldites have agreed to open their gardens to the public on that afternoon. Tickets will be required, with the proceeds going to the Society's Museum. To reserve tickets early, call Mary Mosher at 227-0514 or Marg Lamb at 227-1632.