



# GUELPH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

www.guelphhistoricalsociety.ca

October 2006

## NEWSLETTER

### OCTOBER LECTURE

**D**r. Cindy Comacchio presented her lecture, "Dancing to Perdition: Growing Up in Modern Canada" at the October lecture. It was also the launch of her new book, *The Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of Modern Canada, 1920-1950* (Wilfred Laurier Press, 2006). Dr. Comacchio is one of the leading historians in the area of the family and her research is credited with a resurgence of interest in this field.

Dr. Comacchio's lecture covered many facets of the adolescent experience — education, dating, school, familial relations and work. Dr. Comacchio traced the history of the "problem of modern youth" and the response of experts, governments and social agencies.

Her lecture began with the quotation, "It is time that the civic conscience awakened to the debauchery and degrading circumstances of the dance halls..." written in *The Guelph Mercury* on October 3, 1921. This quotation summarizes contemporary attitudes about the new "modern" youth of the 1920s. Dr. Comacchio stated that the generation that came of age after World War I was different than preceding generations. The war had intensified the industrialization of the world and the years of horrific warfare had damaged the Victorian belief in the ideal of 'progress'. Post-war youth embraced the "modern", which to those who had grown up in previous generations, was unsettling and immoral.

The post-war period is considered the dawn of the modern age — the development of new technologies, advances in medicine and psychology, and the growth of mass consumption through chain stores and credit buying. It was the

adolescents who were the first to embrace these innovations. Canada, itself, was a young, industrial country that looked to youth in its nation-building endeavours. As a result, youth needed to be socialized properly to ensure the best outcome

for the nation. During this period, the school age increased to 16 years, vocational programs were added to high school curricula to prepare students for the changing technologies in the workforce and there was a flourishing of youth organizations to facilitate the proper socialization of adolescents.

### Teenage Years: A Modern Invention

The concept of the teenager is a modern invention. Most children who came of age before World War I were working by age 14. Once children left school they were considered adults. In the post-war period, one of the socio-economic developments was the prolonged period of youth dependency. Compulsory

education laws raised the age for leaving school, the high cost of living, low wages for untrained labour, and the expansion of part-time work contributed to youth dependency. While adolescents may not have had sufficient funds to leave home, some had money left-over from their employment so they could participate in the growing youth market — products directed at youth. For advertisers, youth was a commodity.

Dr. Comacchio's lecture was a survey of the period from 1920 to 1950. Her new book provides readers with extensive detail on the material covered in the lecture. For those interested in this period or the "problem of modern youth", the book is well worth reading.

"It is time that the civic conscience awakened to the debauchery and degrading circumstances of the dance halls... the reeking atmosphere... the absolutely inevitable stirring of sexual passion entailed in the so-called jitney and other similar dances."

*("Guelph Pastor Scores Dancing," The Guelph Mercury, October 3, 1921).*

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### ROSS IRWIN HONOURED AT OCTOBER MEETING

Ross Irwin was awarded a lifetime membership in the Guelph Historical Society for his years of service to the Society. Ross is well-known for his lectures, essays, and books. Ross also served on the GHS Board from for many years. "People associate Ross with Guelph's history," said Elysia DeLaurentis, GHS President, when she presented Ross with his certificate and ripped up his membership cheque for the current year. Thank you Ross for your many contributions to the success of the GHS and to our area's local history.

#### FEE REMINDER

If you have not paid your membership fee for 2006 - 2007,

please do so before December 31. You may pay the Membership Secretary (John Parkyn) at any meeting, or mail a cheque to:

Guelph Historical Society  
100 Crimea St., Unit A102  
Guelph, Ontario N1H 2Y6

Fees are: Single-\$25; Family-\$35; Student-\$12.50; Lifetime-\$175; Institutional-\$25

#### WELCOME BACK

A hearty welcome back to all renewing members, especially to the thirteen people who had been absent for a year or so. A special tip of the GHS hat to our two new members: John Allan and Victor Zboralski.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### GHS NOVEMBER LECTURE

#### "Wellington County's Two Other War Poets"

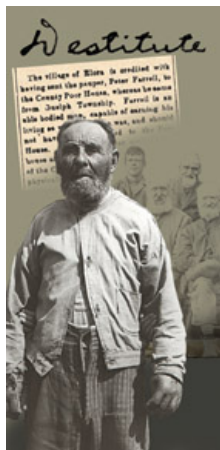
**Speaker:** Greg Oakes

**Date:** November 7, 2006

**Time & Location:** 7:30 p.m.

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, (corner of Norfolk & Suffolk Streets) Refreshments to follow.

As part of the Annual Remembrance Lecture honouring Canada's veterans and military heritage, Greg Oakes will present his lecture, "Wellington County's Two Other War Poets." John McCrae, though famous, was not the only World War I poet from Guelph. Two other local men, Kim Beattie and Frank Prewett, survived the maelstrom of war to write cathartic poetry about their combat experiences. Their contribution to war and remembrance should not be forgotten.



Courtesy of Wellington County Museum & Archives

#### **If These Walls Could Speak: The House of Industry and Refuge, 1877-1947** Wellington County Museum & Archives **Opening Reception: October 29, 12:00 - 4:00 p.m.**

This major exhibit tells the story of over 1,800 men, women and children who found refuge at the "Poor House" in Wellington County between 1877 and 1947. Set within the context of 19th and 20th century social reform, the photographs and documents reveal the struggles of those most vulnerable to misfortune: the very old, the very young, the challenged and the abandoned. For more information visit [www.wcm.on.ca](http://www.wcm.on.ca) or phone 519-846-0916 ext. 226.

### MARK YOUR CALENDAR: MARCH 6, 2007

#### **St. George's Anglican Congregation: 175th Anniversary**

The Guelph Historical Society and St. George's Anglican Church are pleased to commemorate the 175th anniversary of St. George's congregation in March 2007. The GHS will host a guest lecture by Dr. Gil Stelter at St. George's Anglican Church. More information to follow in upcoming GHS newsletters.

## ESSAY CONTEST

### Topic of your choice pertaining to Guelph's History – Any Era

Essays relating to historical events, residents, architecture, etc. can be based on archival documents, personal experiences, interviews, etc.

### CASH PRIZES

**First Prize: \$500 Second Prize: \$350**

**Third Prize: \$200**

An extra \$50 is awarded to a first-time entrant prize winner.

Essays (approximately 3,000 words) will be judged on their originality, literary style and research. Must include references to source materials and photos. Essays become the property of the Guelph Historical Society and may be published in its annual publication **Historic Guelph: The Royal City**.

The Verne McIlwraith Award Contest is sponsored by the Guelph Historical Society and is open to all residents of Guelph and area.

### **DEADLINE: JANUARY 31, 2007**

Mail one hard copy (double-spaced) and a disk or CD to:

Guelph Historical Society "Essay Contest"  
100 Crimea St., Unit A-102  
Guelph, ON N1H 2Y6

Please note that members of the Guelph Historical Society Board are ineligible to receive cash prizes.

### GUELPH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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