

## Evan Macdonald: A Painter's Life

by Leanne Piper

The final meeting of the 2008-09 Evenings with History series paid homage to local artist Evan Macdonald, through the eyes of his daughter Flora Macdonald Spencer. Spencer has detailed the life and work of the artist in her book, released in 2008, *Evan Macdonald: A Painter's Life*, published by Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

The subject of her talk and slideshow was obviously near and dear to the speaker's heart, as she described a man who "paints what he sees, what he wants to see and what he wants you to see." One of his most prolific subjects was Guelph's historic architecture during a time when demolition was rampant and unopposed. His images of beloved buildings – such as the Carnegie Library – in various states of demolition, are among his most popular works. Spencer noted that attitudes towards preservation changed too late, but that her father "would be pleased to know that someone saw the light eventually." As part of her presentation, Spencer displayed slides of early Guelph to give the audience an idea of "what he was responding to."

Macdonald was not strictly a landscape or architectural painter. Born in Guelph in 1905 (descended from one of Guelph's earliest founding families), he studied at Chelsea Polytechnic between 1926-27, followed by a year at the Royal Academy Portrait School. He studied and taught art for many years, and



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Presbyterian Church, at the corner of Norfolk and  
Suffolk Streets, at 7:30 pm unless otherwise stated.

## 2009 - 2010 Schedule

### EVENINGS WITH HISTORY

#### October 6, 2009

*"Discovering Guelph's Legal Past Through Police Eyes -  
The History of the Guelph Police 1827 to 2009"*

Guest Speaker: Sgt. Doug Pflug, Media Officer,  
Guelph Police Services

Sgt. Pflug will cover the daunting process that he and fellow committee members took to create the new book *"Fingerprints Through Time: A History of the Guelph Police."* Join us as he shares excerpts from the book, examine some historical artifacts and discover some newly acquired movie footage.

#### November 3, 2009 – Remembrance Lecture

*"Canadian Forces: Wherever They Are Needed"*

Guest Speaker: Dr. William Winegard

*Dr. Winegard will offer his unique perspective on  
Canada's proud history of service.*

#### December 1, 2009

*"The Missing Link in Presbyterian Guelph: The United  
Presbyterian Church, 1846-1883"*

Guest Speaker: Donna Speers, Archivist, Knox  
Church

Now long forgotten, the United Presbyterian Church once flanked St. Bartholomew's Church at the corner of Dublin and Cambridge Streets. Founded by disaffected members of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, the congregation was led by Rev. Torrance. Mrs. Speers will share her research on the former congregation that worshipped at the church before it was closed, demolished and became one of Guelph's lost buildings.

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between 1943 and 1945 taught the art of camouflage painting during WWII. Macdonald was a young contemporary of the Group of Seven.

Evan Macdonald finally settled back in Guelph in 1945 and continued to pursue his talent for painting. His media included etching, oil, watercolour and pen and ink. He was an accomplished portrait artist, with likenesses of Lt. Col. John McCrae and Premier George Drew among his most recognized works.

Development in the city boomed in the 1950s and 60s and this changing landscape emerged in Macdonald's painting. He painted barns and pastoral rural scenes because, Spencer noted, "he was worried there would be no countryside left." Many of the farmstead landscapes he painted have long been devoured by the growing city.

Spencer further noted that he rarely chose traditional front views of the buildings he immortalized. He "liked the back of things" according to the speaker and preferred to show the more unlikely side of an object. Spencer explained that it was her father's philosophy that "it is the artist's job to separate the art from the mundane by its frame."

Thankfully, Macdonald's work is part of a growing public collection, the core of which is part of the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre collection. Many additional works are part of private collections around the world.

Spencer's book is available for sale at the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre.



The demolition of the Guelph Carnegie Library, one of a series of paintings depicting this iconic building. *Macdonald Stewart Art Centre collection.*

# JOHN GALT DAY KIRKING

The Old Stone Churches, St. George's Kirking Committee, the 2009 John Galt Day Committee, and the Guelph Historical Society hosted the second annual *John Galt Sunday Kirking* on August 2, 2009. "Kirking" is a Scottish ceremonial parade of dignitaries led by a piper as a prelude to a civic church service. The service recognizes the public service of local leaders, expresses hope for their wisdom, and shows appreciation for their dedication to the local community. This ceremony was practised in John Galt's Irvine, Scotland at the time of Guelph's founding in 1827.

We had a wonderful response to the event this year. An impressive parade of civic leaders followed Piper Don Macrae and our Parade Marshalls Mr. Peter Anderson and Dr. Gil Stelter from the River Run Centre to St. George's Church. This year Rev. Hollis Hiscock, Rev. Canon Jean Mitchell and the congregation of St. George's Church hosted the service. Over 550 people attended the ecumenical service and garden reception at St. George's Church.

Two local charities benefitted from the generosity of the participants. The Welcome In Drop-in Centre on Gordon Street and the Chalmers Community Services Centre (Chalmers Fair Share Food Shelf) on Baker Street were designated to receive half of the collection of non-perishable food donated by the invited guests and other participants. Both organizations were pleased to receive the foodstuffs as their inventories are low during the summer months.

We look forward to hosting the Kirking in 2010.



## 2010 Schedule

*continued from page 1*

## EVENINGS WITH HISTORY

### February 2, 2010

University of Guelph Lecture

*"The Early Settlement of Ontario: The Untold Story"*

Guest Speaker: Dr. Catharine Wilson,

Department of History, University of Guelph

Catharine Wilson challenges notions of early Ontario as a freeholding society with evidence that tenants were a common and important part of the economy. She details why tenancy has been overlooked and what it was like to be a tenant farm family with statistics and human dramas drawn from various parts of the province including Wellington County.

### March 2, 2010

*"Building the Wall"*

Guest Speaker: Ross Irwin, Guelph Historical Society

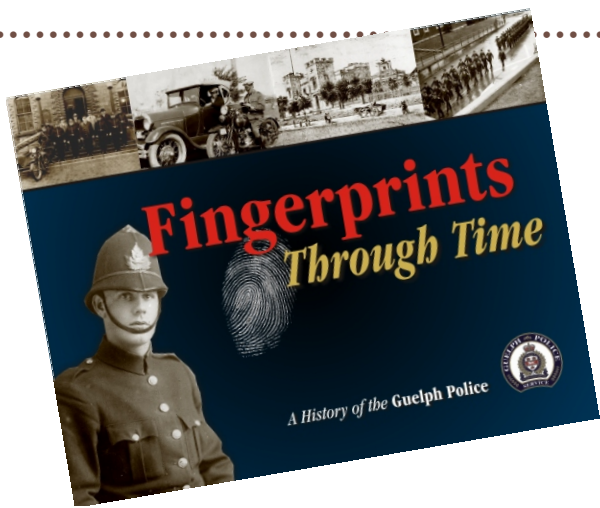
The beautiful stone wall confining the Speed River through Royal City Park was built with relief labour in the 1930s. How it came about and political problems in its construction will be presented along with a brief introduction on the early recreational use of the river and the development of Guelph's early park system in 1909.

### April 6, 2010

*"Change and Continuity in Local Architecture: The Wellington County Museum and Archives' Gordon Couling Collection"*

Elysia De Laurentis, Wellington County Museum Artist and Professor, Gordon Couling, not only witnessed changes to Guelph's streetscapes and surrounding countryside, but spent years documenting their transformation. This talk will offer a sampling of the thousands of photographs through which he recorded the creation, destruction, and evolution of buildings in Guelph and Wellington County between 1950 and 1983. This collection is an invaluable resource for architectural historians and those interested in the history of their homes.

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## BOOK RELEASE in NOVEMBER

Filled with crime stories and fascinating facts about law and order throughout Guelph's history (1827 to present day), this new book has been over a year in the making. The Guelph Historical Society Board endorsed the project last year, and several GHS members have contributed to its production.

A publication of the Guelph Police Service, the book contains never-before-seen photos that have been stored in Police collection files. Two former *Mercury* court reporters, John D'Alton and Bob Rutter, along with historian and city councillor Leanne Piper, authored the book, sifting through hundreds of pages of notes, Chiefs reports and newspaper clippings to bring the darker side and lighter side of policing to life.

*PRE-ORDERS will be accepted in person at the October GHS meeting or by emailing Sgt. Douglas Pflug at [douglas.pflug@police.guelph.on.ca](mailto:douglas.pflug@police.guelph.on.ca). Book release is expected November 11, 2009. Cost is \$35 (including tax).*

**The Guelph Police History Book Committee wishes to thank the following GHS members for their contribution to the production of "Fingerprints Through Time":**

Leanne Piper  
John Parkyn  
Debra Nash-Chambers  
Ross Irwin

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **Evenings with History: Non-Members**

The Board of the Guelph Historical Society has passed a motion to request that non-members make a donation of \$5.00 to attend our monthly lectures. The money will be used to help defray the costs associated with the lectures -- the speakers' honorarium, refreshments and the hall rental. A donation box will be available at the meetings. For more information, please contact Ann Guthrie at [ann-guthrie@sympatico.ca](mailto:ann-guthrie@sympatico.ca).

## OTHER EVENTS

### **Wednesday, October 21, 2009**

#### **7:00 pm at 10 Carden Street, Guelph**

The Guelph & Wellington Branch of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario presents: "*Marrying Green and Heritage: The Restoration of 60 Manitoba Street (Guelph)*"

Speakers: Susan Ratcliffe, Leanne Piper, Ben Polley

### **Popular Museum Series**

Guelph Museums and Laurier Centre for Military, Strategic and Disarmament Studies offer a lecture series on various aspects of Canada's military history. Free admission. All lectures start at 7:30 pm. Seating is limited. Doors open at 6:30 pm. Location: Guelph Civic Museum, 6 Dublin Street.

### **Thursday, October 15, 2009 - 7:30 pm**

*Spies Like Us: Canadians in Nazi-Occupied France*, Jonathan Vance, University of Western Ontario

### **Thursday, November 19, 2009 - 7:30 pm -**

*'The war of the poor relations': The Canadians at the Lamone, December 1944*, Eric McGeer, St. Clement's School

### **Thursday, January 21, 2010 - 7:30 pm -**

*U-boats in the St. Lawrence, 1942-1944: A Most Uniquely Canadian Battle*, Roger Sarty, Wilfrid Laurier University