



# Guelph Historical Society

February 2010

## Newsletter

### **Natural Beauty and Natural Bounty: Guelph and the Environment**

In December 2009, Dr. Debra Nash-Chambers presented a fascinating lecture entitled, "*Natural Beauty and Natural Bounty: Guelph and the Environment, 1827-1927*". In the lecture, Dr. Nash-Chambers discussed Guelph's natural features and their influence on the development and character of the city. Guelph's natural bounty land, forests, rivers and stone supported the city's agricultural, commercial and industrial development. The natural beauty of the watershed also created recreational opportunities for the growing population. Dr. Nash-Chambers also discussed the problems that beset Guelph with the rise of industrialization and population growth, that is, pollution and infectious diseases.

In researching this lecture, Dr. Nash-Chambers used local resources available through the Guelph Museums, Guelph Public Library, Wellington County Museum and Archives and the publications of the Guelph Historical Society.

The early landscape of Guelph and its environs was endowed with a rich natural bounty: high quality soil for agriculture, rivers for grist and sawmills and limestone for quarrying. This resource potential and the topography of the site figured largely in Galt's vision of a planned community in the Guelph Block. "Galt's design for the town showcased the natural vistas that the hills rising from the river valleys offered. He utilized their appeal in his promotional concept for the community," says Nash-Chambers.

*continued on page 4*

[guelphhistoricalsociety.ca](http://guelphhistoricalsociety.ca)

*2010 Schedule*

### **EVENINGS WITH HISTORY**

**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 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

*"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.

**All GHS meetings are held at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, at the corner of Norfolk and Suffolk Streets, at 7:30 pm unless otherwise stated.**

**CELEBRATE!**

**HERITAGE WEEK**

**February 15 - 21, 2010**



## GHS BOARD

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**ARCHIVES:** Open

**SPECIAL EVENTS:** Open

**PUBLICITY:** Open

**WEBSITE:** [guelphhistoricalsociety.ca](http://guelphhistoricalsociety.ca)

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# THE GUELPH FARMERS' AND MECHANICS' INSTITUTE

By Ross W. Irwin

Thomas Sandilands opened a general store in a small log building at the south-east corner of Wyndham and Macdonell Streets in 1832. He conducted a lending library from the store.

Interest in, and time for reading increased so on January 18, 1850, a public meeting was held to discuss the formation of a Mechanics' Institute, "which would affect young men of the town for self improvement after hours of labour."

The name, the "Farmers' and Mechanics' Institute" was chosen in consideration for both rural and urban people. C. J. Mickle was President and Thomas Sandilands, the Secretary. An annual fee was established at five shillings for adults and two shillings & sixpence for junior members.

The first meeting of the Institute was February 1, 1850. By March, it subscribed to four newspapers and had a library of 250 volumes. The reading room was open three evenings a week. The librarian was William Hoskin.

By 1851, the Institute had 404 volumes and 119 members and was open each day from 11 am to 3 pm and two evenings. Current newspapers were the major interest.

At the first meeting of Town Council in the new Market House on March 1, 1858, the Mechanics' Institute obtained space in the building at \$10 a year. The lease expired January 1 of each year and had to be renewed by Council. In 1860 a motion of Council asked them to leave; however, it was defeated.

In August 1862, the Fire Department moved out of Town Hall to the Engine House at the rear, leaving the north-east corner vacant. The Mechanics' Institute moved into this larger space.

The Institute rented space (\$1 per night) in the Engine House to offer public lectures in 1863 and in 1865 for an exhibition in the Council Chamber. The Institute programs expanded beyond the sponsorship of a reading room.

When renovation to the Town Hall was carried out in 1869, the library was moved to a room on the left of the main entrance and the town clerk took over the Institute space. By 1873, it held 2,000 volumes and many newspapers.

*continued on page 3*

**NEWSLETTER  
AVAILABLE in COLOUR!**  
A full colour version of the GHS  
Newsletter is available online at  
[guelphhistoricalsociety.ca](http://guelphhistoricalsociety.ca)

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# Our Early Pioneers

To their native homes they bade farewell,  
Some bade farewell in tears  
And launched upon the ocean swell  
Those early settlers, our pioneers,  
They set their course to the setting sun  
Hoping a distant land to gain  
Where fertile fields were to be won  
From nature's wild domain.

When their long voyages ended at last  
They found a green forested land  
In silent grandeur dark and vast,  
Sown only by nature's liberal hand.  
While rooted deep in fertile soil laid,  
They grew and thrived untouched by man,  
And winding under the forest's shade  
Teeming creeks and streams freely ran.

The swinging axe broke the peaceful spell.  
Trees thundered to the ground.  
The crash upon the silence fell  
And reverberated all around.  
Thus homes were built wherein to dwell  
The cabin walls were rough and rude.  
Livestock roamed nearby with tinkling bell  
And grazed amid the leafy wood.

The years passed by while harvests smiled  
And ripened in the sun.  
More fields were taken from the wild  
And added to those already won.  
Like gain before the reaper's stroke  
The woods were made to bow  
Until hill and dale in splendour broke  
Yielding to the settlers' plough.

In the prime of life while his health was sound  
The settler tilled the soil.  
Disappointments were cast to the ground  
During many years of weary toil.  
Although to life's battle he was bred  
His hands had trembled in the fray  
As ever onward he fought and led  
When hope was thrown in disarray.

His struggle he met face to face  
Until life's labours were all done.  
His comrades bore him from his place  
And from the fields that he had won.  
And in the lonely churchyard ground,  
They buried him with kindly hand,  
Their well-tried friend with honour crowned,  
Far from his native land.

The pioneers who led the way  
Into the silent wood  
And settled in that early day  
They firm, like heroes, stood.  
They trembled to the silent tomb,  
Their hair grown white with years.  
Still in our hearts we give them room  
Our dauntless pioneers.

*by Henry Law U.E.*  
October 24, 2009

## **Mechanics' Institute** *continued from page 2*

An annex to the Town Hall was opened in 1875 and the Institute asked for larger space in this new area. Council declined and the Institute sought other space in the Speed Lodge Masonic Block at 109 Wyndham St. N. This building had three storeys. The library was on the second floor. Jennie Hoskin, daughter of William, had been the librarian from about 1873.

In 1882, the Free Libraries Act was passed permitting Guelph to establish a library supported by taxation. Bylaw 89, January 15, 1883, provided for a vote of the ratepayers. The vote was approved

and City Council Bylaw 99 (April 16, 1883) provided for the assumption of the assets of the Farmers' and Mechanics' Institute. The librarian was paid \$25 a month and space cost \$200 a year. In 1881, the library had 2625 books. Guelph was one of the first municipalities in the province to participate in this new program. A Library Board formed.

In 1902, a movement began to seek money from the Carnegie Foundation to build a new library. It opened on September 29, 1905.

**December Lecture** *continued from page 1*

The Canada Company chose the site for the Guelph settlement at the confluence of the Speed and Eramosa Rivers. These rivers had enormous potential for generating power for milling operations. Later, the creeks and springs of the watershed supported a growing population and the brewing industry. The extensive stands of timber in the area fed the local sawmills and helped the town to grow. Prior to 1850, most of the buildings in Guelph were constructed from wood.

After 1850, stone became the preferred building material. Guelph had an abundance of amber-hued, dolomite stone in ridges along the river valleys to the southwest and southeast of the commercial core of town. Stone quarried in Guelph contributed to the beauty and air of permanence of the downtown streetscapes.

“The history of development in Guelph, Ontario from 1827 to 1927 underscores that the location chosen for the Guelph settlement by Canada Company Superintendent John Galt was sound,” says Nash-Chambers. Today, evidence of Guelph's natural beauty and natural bounty abounds whether it is our parks, remnants of the nineteenth century industrial core, or the character of our downtown architecture.

*Submitted by Ann Guthrie*

## **CELEBRATE HERITAGE WEEK**

**February 15-21, 2010**

Come out and visit the Guelph Historical Society at the Heritage Showcase at Stone Road Mall on Saturday, February 13, 2010 between 10:00 am and 5:00 pm.

# **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

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

Non-members are requested to pay a \$5 fee when attending GHS Lectures. The money is 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).

## **Membership Fee Increase**

At its January meeting, the GHS Board passed a motion of its intent to seek an increase in membership dues at the Annual General Meeting on April 6, 2010. Membership fees have not changed in many years, and this step is necessary to cover the increasing cost of operating expenses, such as postage. Proposed new membership fees are as follows:

\$30 for individuals	\$40 for couples/families
\$200 lifetime (individual)	\$300 lifetime (couple/family)

## **Appeal for Board Members**

Your GHS Board is hoping to add some friendly new faces this year! The time commitment is minimal as we meet once per month. If you are looking for an opportunity to contribute to the GHS in a meaningful way – this is it! Contact President Ann Guthrie at 519-763-6475 for further information.

# **OTHER EVENTS**

## **Architectural Conservancy of Ontario - Guelph and Wellington Branch**

**Wednesday, February 17, 2010**

7:00 pm - CAW Hall, 611 Silvercreek Pkwy N. (The Schoolhouse)

**Annual “Great Houses of Guelph” Series  
“Kingsmill House”**

*Speaker: Frank Valeriote, MP, and owner of the Kingsmill House*

**Sunday, February 7, 2010**

Third Annual Eden Mills History Day at the Eden Mills Community Centre **1:30 to 4:30 pm**

## **The Elora Centre for the Arts**

is presenting a series of four Heritage Workshops. Topics include heritage restoration and cultural heritage landscapes. For more information on dates and speakers go to [www.eloracentreforthearts.ca](http://www.eloracentreforthearts.ca)