



ESQUESING  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY  
NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 51, Georgetown, Ontario, Canada L7G 4T1  
[www.esquesinghistoricalsociety.ca](http://www.esquesinghistoricalsociety.ca)

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May -June 2016

## THE FENIAN INVASION

Since our last issue the Province has been thrown into the greatest state of excitement by an invasion of the Fenian brotherhood upon our soil. On Friday morning last, when Canada was at profound peace with the whole world, and every man peacefully pursued his usual avocations, disregarding the deep mutterings of the coming struggle as but the yelping of disappointed curs, the Fenians left words for actions, crossed the Niagara River at Black Rock, landed at Fort Erie, and unfurled their cursed banner to the breeze. Canada was aroused to spew forth the scum of the American cities. The whole volunteer force, about 255 companies, was called out, and put under the command of Imperial authorities. At a moment's warning our men were called out – not a man faltered. New volunteers pressed for admission into the ranks, and there was a readiness in every man to shoulder his musket and risk his life for his country. We doubt if there ever was a deeper, stronger, or more vehement exhibition of patriotism on the part of any people than was shown on the first day of June. The whole people would have rejoiced to have been called out to shoot the ruffians who have desecrated our soil. All the narrow distinctions of party were swept away, as the flimsy cobwebs of politician's brains, by the patriotic throbbing of true British hearts. In fact the zeal of our volunteers has almost overshot the mark and caused them to rush inconsiderately into the work without waiting for proper support by the redcoats. Wherever fighting was done, it was performed by our Volunteers of whom Canada has every reason to feel proud. We doubt if there is anything more glorious in history than the unequal contest of Major Denis and the Welland battery with the whole Fenian horde...

All the narrow distinctions of party were swept away, as the flimsy cobwebs of politician's brains, by the patriotic throbbing of true British hearts.

-*Canadian Champion*, 7 June 1866

## Fenian Raid, June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1866 –Georgetown Company

By Major Lachlan Grant

Following are the names of the volunteers in Georgetown Company who took part in the Fenian Raid. –

Captain James Young	Lieut. W.W. Roe	Ensign John R. Barber
Drill Sergeant Robert Burwood, Prince Consort's Rifles		Corp. Nicholas Armour
Robert Bailey	Ben. Barker	Joseph Barber
Wm. Carson	John Cook	Wm. Donaldson
Hiram Grandom	Jas. Goodwillie	Thomas B. Godfrey
Sergt. Wm. H. Godfrey	Sergt. Wm. Gane	William Hardy
Henry Harris	Thomas Harris	Byron Hill
John Hardacre	Charles Kennedy	Jacob Kennedy
Albert Kennedy	Andrew Love	J. Livingstone
James Mitchell	Sgt. Maj. Walter McKay	Corp. Daniel McKenzie
Robert McGaw	Robert McIllray	William McIllray
Henry Norrige	Chas. O'Mears	Robert Pierson
Chas. Pell	Sergt. Dugald Reid	Stephen Stull
Brock Stull	D. S. Travis	Daniel Watson
Thos. J. Wheeler	Henry Willis	John F. Taylor
Isaac Taylor	Joseph Wedsworth	

-Georgetown Herald 4 June 1924

### OBITUARY

#### CAPT. JAMES JOHNSTON

At the ripe age of 85 years, Capt. Johnston, Stewarttown, passed away on the 9th inst. He was a man of fine character and during his long residence in Esquesing he enjoyed the highest esteem. During the Fenian Raid of 1866 the Capt. was an active member of the militia. Half a century later he delighted to recount in vivid detail the

experiences of those exciting days. He was a man of sterling character and his influence in the community was always for its betterment. ...

-Acton Free Press, 18 July 1918

#### Thomas James Wheeler

... Mr. Wheeler was born at Marlboro, Wiltshire, England in the year 1838 and he was in his 73<sup>rd</sup> year.

Mr. Wheeler was the last but one of the Georgetown Company who served in the Fenian raid. Mr. J. R. Barber is now the only remaining member....

-Georgetown Herald 2 Nov. 1910

#### John R. Barber Dead

Pioneer Paper Manufacturer and Worthy Citizen Passes to his Reward

Deceased was born in Georgetown July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1841 ...

He served as an officer in the Georgetown Light Infantry Co., and the 20<sup>th</sup> Halton Rifles, 1863-1905; served twenty-two years as Quartermaster and paymaster; (Medal for service in the Fenian Raids and long service medal); ranked as Major from October 1875; retired from military service, 1905....

-Georgetown Herald, 7 March 1917



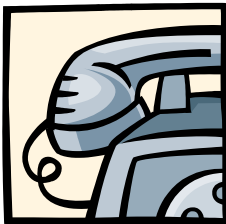
## **ESQUESING HISTORICAL SOCIETY SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS**

**2016**

- Wed. 11<sup>th</sup> **“THE CURSED FENIANS!”**  
 May 2016 Local historian and author Rev. Rick Ruggle will revisit the Fenian Raids of 1866 and regale us with tales of their “attacks” on Canada and our response, leading to the formal organization of our militia.  
 KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, Main Street, Georgetown, 7:30 p.m.
- Wed. 9<sup>th</sup> **NORVAL VILLAGE WALKING TOUR**  
 June 2016 Stroll through the streets of Norval village and learn about its history from life-long resident Kathy Gastle, former Mayor of Halton Hills and President of the Norval Lucy Maud Montgomery Society. Note the early start time of 7 p.m.  
 NORVAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, 499 Guelph Street, Norval, 7:00 p.m.
- Fri. 1<sup>st</sup> **GLEN WILLIAMS HISTORICAL WALK**  
 July 2016 Join local historian Mark Rowe on his morning walking tour of the village. Strolling through the village, Mark will point out buildings of historic merit and relate a few stories associated with them. It will conclude in plenty of time to garner a good spot to watch the Canada Day parade.  
 WILLIAMS MILL PARKING LOT, 515 Main Street, Glen Williams, 10 a.m.
- Wed. 14<sup>th</sup> **VICTORIAN MEDICINE SHOW**  
 Sept. 2016 Nancy MacLeod, a retired nurse, will bring some of her Victorian-era medical equipment to provide a frightfully fun evening. Blood-letting, amputation, and tooth extraction will be discussed. Nancy has a collection of more than 200 authentic medical items from a century and more ago.  
 KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, Main Street, Georgetown, 7:30 p.m.
- Wed. 12<sup>th</sup> **THOMAS LIVINGSTONE CHISHOLM**  
 Oct. 2016 Details in your next newsletter!

### **INVITE YOUR NEIGHBOUR TO BECOME A MEMBER!**

Refreshments served from 7:00 p.m.



Stephen Blake	905 877-8251	President
Karen Hunter	905 877-7363	Treasurer
Dawn Livingstone	905 877-6506	Secretary
J. Mark Rowe	905 877-9510	Archivist
Jan Raymond	905 877-9172	Social
David Borrett	905 702-0737	Membership
Ron Raffan	905 457-7696	Webmaster
Ray Denny	905 877-3890	Publications

## Society Notes

### INTERNET CONNECTIONS

<[www.esquesinghistoricalsociety.ca](http://www.esquesinghistoricalsociety.ca)>

Send your e-mail to [mrowe6@sympatico.ca](mailto:mrowe6@sympatico.ca)

### EHS NEWSLETTER

John Mark Rowe prepared this newsletter with assistance from Karen Hunter and Dawn Livingstone. Submissions welcome. Please consider an electronic newsletter sent to your e-mail address. Not only will you save the Society postage, you get to see the colour pictures!

### MEMBERSHIP

We now have 82 members for 2016. Encourage your friends and family to join the Society. The individual membership rate is \$20. The family or institution rate is \$25. Cheques payable to the Society can be mailed to our post box or payable by cash or cheque to our membership secretary, David Borrett at a public meeting.

### ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO

[www.archives.gov.on.ca](http://www.archives.gov.on.ca)

### EHS ARCHIVES

We are awaiting word on our application for a summer student. He or she will continue our on-going updates of the photo shelf list and the scanning of our photo collection. Karen and Mark continue to process archive and photo donations to keep our collection up to date. An interesting recent addition was a ledger from Barnhill's Store, Norval dating from the years before World War I. There will be an Archive tour on Sunday 15 May as part of the OGS meeting (see below). All are welcome!

### HALTON-PEEL OGS

May 15 - Genealogy Road Show — chat with experts in different areas of genealogical research and family tree data record-keeping.

Georgetown Public Library 2-4 p.m.

### DEVEREAUX HOUSE

Open Thursdays 1-6 p.m. at 11494 Trafalgar Road, Georgetown. May 12 & 13 -

Mother's Day Tea. E-mail Ann at

[ann@devereauxhouse.ca](mailto:ann@devereauxhouse.ca)

### STREETSVILLE HIST. SOCIETY

Archives are open Sundays and Wednesdays from 1 to 4 p.m. at 4415 Mississauga road, Streetsville.

May 14 – Tour of Peel Archives and Art Museum, 1:30-3 p.m. \$5 -Call Anne Byard

May 28 –Plant Sale and Pancakes at Leslie House from 8:30 to 2:30 p.m.

August 12<sup>th</sup> - The Honourable Alexander Leslie, Chief of Clan Leslie to visit Leslie log house from 12:30 – 2 p.m.

### BRAMPTON HIST. SOCIETY

Heart Lake Presbyterian Church at 7:15.

May 19 – *Diane Reid and Sarah Walker* on "Getting Dressed in 1885"

June 16 - *Karen Millyard*, Social Dance Historian

### MILTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Society meets at the Waldie Blacksmith Shop at 16 James Street on the third Thursday at 7:30 p.m.

May 19 - *Sandy McInnes*, Osler castle of Collingwood

### NASAGIWEYA HIST. SOCIETY

[info@nasagiweyahistoricalociety.com](mailto:info@nasagiweyahistoricalociety.com)

Meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. on the 2nd Tuesday of March, April (Annual Meeting), May, June, July, August (BBQ), September, October, November (Remembrance Day), December (Christmas Potluck).

### TRAFALGAR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

All events at former Palermo Schoolhouse, 2431 Dundas Street West, Oakville.

<http://www.tths.ca/events.html>

### HALTON HILLS SPORTS MUSEUM

OPEN: Sat. 7-9 p.m. & Sunday 1-4:30 p.m. at Mold-Masters Sportsplex.

They are accepting nominations for the Sports Hall of Fame at [jboyce3@cogeco.ca](mailto:jboyce3@cogeco.ca)

The gala induction ceremony is on June 16<sup>th</sup> at the John Elliott Theatre, Georgetown.

### TERRA COTTA HALL

Terra Cotta Community Hall rentals:  
Contact Jen Lusby at 905-702-1056.

## HOMECHILDREN MEETING



*A message follows from the McVittie Family (pictured above) who came to our April meeting.*

My grandfather, John McVittie was a homechild. He and his twin brother Joe came to Canada in 1914 from Dr. Barnardo's home in London. The boys were only 11 at the time (They passed as 14, the age required to immigrate). John and Joe were sent to separate farms in Essex County (Windsor ON area). The boys would walk 8 miles every Sunday to church in order to see each other. Tragically a few years after arriving, Joe died from blood poisoning from a pitchfork in the foot. It is assumed if he had received proper medical attention his death could have been avoided. My grandfathers' first placement family made him sleep in the barn with only a bible for reading material.

After finishing his contract, my grandfather married and traveled to British Columbia to assist the Canadian Government with tobacco growing techniques. He and grandmother returned to Essex county to purchase their own farm. His contributions to Canada were numerous. In addition to farming he helped with the war effort. John and Audrey McVittie raised 3 children. Their family tree of direct descendants totals to date 26.

Thank you for putting on such an informative and lovely evening. We all enjoyed ourselves!

## 1943 NEWS

### Lightning Leaves Victory Sign After Hay Loader Struck

A peculiar freak of a bolt of lightning was reported after the storm late Tuesday afternoon. A hay loader in the field on the farm of Mr. Fred Denny, adjoining Acton was struck and badly damaged. On the ground running away from the loader were two streaks of earth plowed up by the lightning. At the end of each of these streaks in the ground was a distinct V ...  
-Acton Free Press, 15 July 1943

### This advert from *The Toronto Star* dates from 17 July 1943



# **A Walk in the Woods: The Eastern Hemlocks of Halton Hills**

## **An Ode to *Tsuga Canadensis***

by Michael Schultz

**“Since the dawn of history humans have made great uses of leather. They’ve worn it, walked on it, sat on it, wrote on it. Turning animal skin into a durable product requires processing and in primitive times, hides were tanned using animal brains, dung, urine, ash and smoke.” 1**

Most of us are somewhat familiar with the major role leather production played in Acton’s past. Salted carcasses from Toronto slaughterhouses made their way to Acton for processing on the Grand Trunk Railway starting in the 1860s. Before the modern Hide House retail store, storage warehouses in the area were known as ‘hide houses’. For years, leather for products such as belts and shoes was manufactured in



our community.

**Beardmore Tannery – Acton  
EHS21688**

But how many of us know the importance played by the eastern hemlock that once thrived in this area? The bark of this majestic tree allowed the leather industry to prosper. Hemlock bark contains tannins used for tanning hides. From a cost perspective, tanneries were built near the hemlock rather than shipping the bark to the hides. Without the hemlock, the Beardmore tannery in Acton would not have risen to be the largest tannery operation in the British Empire by the early 1900s.

I came across an old hemlock on a recent Bruce Trail hike south of Acton between the 4<sup>th</sup> Line and Speyside. A sign declared it was close to 150 years old. Hemlock trees can reach 500 – 600 years old and tower over 150 feet tall. This slow-growing and long-lived tree is native to northeastern North America. In Canada, it is found in Ontario, Quebec, and the Maritime Provinces but not Newfoundland and Labrador (there are other North American hemlock species).

My fascination with the eastern hemlock or *Tsuga Canadensis* (or Pruche du Canada) really began in my own backyard. I have a large 75-80 foot hemlock on my property. It was big in the early 1980s when I arrived

here. Somehow the saws of yesteryear missed it. I'd hazard a guess that it is close to 200 years old. I measured it by stringing a rope around the base – it is over 10 feet in circumference.

Across the road from us and about ½ km. into a distant forest, there is a remaining stand of six to eight large hemlock that provide an excellent canopy for deer and other wildlife. There are plenty of hemlock trees found along the Speyside section of the Bruce Trail as well.

The eastern hemlock became the state tree of Pennsylvania in 1931. (In Ontario we honour the Eastern White Pine.)

Today leather is tanned with other chemicals but, historically, the leather industry had a voracious appetite for this spruce. Like many of us, it has a low tolerance for urban stress.

By 1876, leather baron George Beardmore moved his tanning operation to Bracebridge from Acton because hemlock bark was in 'critical' supply. He returned in 1887, repossessed the tannery and presumably found it 'worth the drive to Acton.'

Hemlock has been used widely in the production of crates, flooring, cabins and pulp and its strong holding power for spikes made it popular as railway ties.

In the case of tanning, it is unfortunate how the hemlock was harvested. Historian Terry Boyle

describes the process in his recent book, **HIDDEN ONTARIO**:



### **Hemlock on Author's property**

“The hemlock spruces were not considered to have any other value before the Second World War and whole stands of these trees were clear-cut just for the bark, the wood left in the bush to rot.” 2

Lumberjacks and farmers were enticed by the ads Beardmore placed in his search for a steady supply of good hemlock bark:

“I will pay five dollars per cord at the Acton Tannery if delivered in summer.” (Probably \$750.00 to \$1,000.00 today)

According to Boyle, “The Acton Free Press once reported farmers bringing bark to the tannery at a rate of 20-30 loads at a time, by teams (of horses), in a long string, down the main street of Acton.” 3



Today Halton Hills residents are more concerned with other forms of traffic gridlock – odd to think it was once congested with loads of hemlock bark!

The area cleared by Speyside settlers was significant. They hauled their ‘treasure’ along a narrow, rough road through the bush from Speyside to Acton. You can almost feel their presence as you walk the quiet Bruce Trail.

The eastern hemlock survives today despite the harvesting of days gone by, but it is not ‘out of the woods’ yet. In 1920s, a sap-sucking bug was accidentally introduced in the United States from Asia. Known as the ‘hemlock woolly adelgid’ (HWA), it started threatening eastern hemlock in the Smoky Mountains of the United

States in the 1960s. While the HWA appears to be more widespread south of the border, indications are that it’s moving northward. It has been spotted in Ontario lately.

If you’re holding a grudge against hemlock because you think the philosopher Socrates met his maker drinking hemlock tea, you can relax. It was an entirely different hemlock plant – in fact, eastern hemlock does make a safe, refreshing, clear tea from fresh branch sprigs.

Next time you encounter an eastern hemlock show it a little respect. The tree has paid its ‘dues’.

**Michael Schultz is a freelance writer, an outdoor enthusiast, and a member of the Bruce Trail Conservancy living in “Hemlock Hills.”**

#### **Works Cited:**

1. Hugh O. Canham, “Hemlock and Hide: The Tanbark Industry in Old New York”, **Northern Woodlands**, Summer 2011.
2. Terry Boyle, **HIDDEN ONTARIO**, Secrets from Ontario’s Past, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Dundurn Press, 2011, Pg 10.
3. Ibid
4. Esquesing Historical Society – [www.esquesinghistoricalsociety.ca](http://www.esquesinghistoricalsociety.ca)
5. The Bruce Trail Conservancy – [www.brucetrail.org](http://www.brucetrail.org)
6. The Hide House – Acton, [www.hidehouse.ca](http://www.hidehouse.ca)
7. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tsuga canadensis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tsuga_canadensis)  
<http://www.nativetreesociety.org>



## SELECT NORVAL BUILDINGS



### **Norval Presbyterian Church**

499 Guelph Street

This Gothic red brick Church, with a spire that dominates the village, was built in 1878.

The postcard at left dates from about 1908. –EHS301

### **Norval Church of Christ**

9924 Winston Churchill Blvd.

This log meeting house was built about 1840 on the Tenth Line by Elder John Menzies and later moved to this location. In June 1843, the first meeting of the Ontario Disciples of Christ took place in this building.

### **The Shoemaker and Broom-Maker's Home**

8 Adamson Street

In the early 1840s William Hamilton, a shoemaker, and his family came to Norval. His brick cottage has lath and plaster inside, so it was probably built in

the late 1850s, or early 1860s. His son Robert Hamilton started a broom factory in the village about 1877.

### **Presbyterian Manse**

402 Draper Street

A substantial red brick Manse in an Italianate style was built in 1888. Its most famous occupant was famous author Lucy Maud Montgomery, while her husband, Ewan MacDonald was the minister.



The picture above was taken in 1928 by L.M. Montgomery and is from the University of Guelph Archives.

### **Lilac Lawns**

457 Guelph Street

The two storey reddish brown brick, Classical Revival house was built about 1854 by Arthur Little, a shoemaker. The name refers to the numerous lilac bushes, planted in 1867, that grace the property.

### **The Farmers Bank**

2 Adamson Street

The Farmers Bank of Canada opened in Toronto in 1906. The list of directors included Robert Noble, proprietor of Noble's Flour Mills in Norval. It was little wonder that a substantial bank was built in 1907. After failing in December



1910, the building was sold to the Metropolitan Bank of Toronto. In November 1914, that bank was amalgamated with the Bank of Nova Scotia. The Bank operated until April 1931, closing after a fire reduced the production of the Norval Mill.

The postcard is from 1908. –EHS304

### **Gooderham House**

503 Guelph Street

William Gooderham ran the flour mills at Norval from 1845 until 1859 and built this house about 1850. He also ran the tannery, general store and distillery in the village. He was later one partner in the distillery firm of Gooderham and Worts of Toronto.

### **The British Hotel**

401 Draper Street

This frame Georgian house was built about 1840 to serve as a hotel. It later became a private residence and a wing was removed and a foundation added.

### **St. Paul's Anglican Church**

16 Adamson Street South

This Anglican Church was built in 1846 and is the original building.