

## ESQUESING HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 51, Georgetown, Ontario, Canada L7G 4T1

[www.esquesinghistoricalsociety.com](http://www.esquesinghistoricalsociety.com)

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## SETTLEMENT OF ESQUESING TOWNSHIP

On 2 April 1819, the private secretary to the Lieutenant-Governor wrote to the Surveyor-General in the following terms:



“I am directed by His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor to inform you that he has decided the following names be given to the three Townships in the Missisague [sic] Tract now under order of survey – namely – to the western Township (in the rear of Nelson) that of Nassagiweya – To the centre Township (in the rear of Trafalgar) the of Esquesing – And to the eastern Township (in the rear of Toronto) that of Chinguacousy, being the Indian names of the principal rivers in each respectively.”

The native village on Scotsdale Farm has been dated to 1550- 1580. Crawford Lake is dated to the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

A colourful and unintentionally amusing account of the summer of 1819 in York was written by another future settler in Esquesing Township, James Laidlaw, a 60-year-old immigrant from Ettrick, Scotland, who was shortly to take up his land grant in Lot 5, Concession 3, Esquesing, wrote as follows to his son Robert in Scotland:

“York, September 9, 1819

Dear Robert,

I write you this, to let you Know, that we are still alive, which is a great mercy. We Came here on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Aprile; but, as there was no land ready misered, we were obliged to take a House for this Summer, and an acre of a Garden: we had to stay in it until we get the Crop of the Garden. When we are for going to our Land, we have Each of us one 100 acers; and Andrew is a little of from us; Walter and me had 200 acres in one Lott,



as we had to Draw it all by Ballot in two Hundred acres,...We are mostly all Scotts men and has got a Township to be all together, or what is Called, a parish in Scotland. They give 60,000 acres foe one Township. There is a Great meny people Settling hear. Government bought a Large Tract of Country from the Indians Last Year. This end of it was only about 12 Mills of York, and very good Land, So that people was all for on it, it Being So near the Capital of the Province, but we were Two Long of getting our Grant, that the Land was all taken up Near the Town, so that we will be 30 Mills from York; but the Land is good, for Walter and Andrew has been on it...We have Eighteen Mounths to do our settling duties in, where we have to clear fice acres Each, and put up a House, and then we get our Deed for Ever to our Selvs and hirs. We have had our health middling well Since we Came hear, until six weeks ago, that Wat was taken with ague; he had it only about Two weeks, when he got better; then Andrew took it and he has had it this mounth, but is now getting Better – but very weak; they have wrought all this Summer with people in the Town for Six shillings a-day, but did not get their victules, they have made a good dale of money; but we have had to pay Dear for the House; but we have a good Garden that we can live upon and has sold a great dale out of it a 100 Duson of Cowcombres, and thirty Bushels of potatoes. We had peas 10 foot High and Beans 12 foot some Hundreds after one. It has been a very warm Summer hear, and there is a fine Crop of Every Kind of grain and Hundreds of people Coming from the old Country to eat of it...”



The authorities were aware of several fairly large parties of settlers who wished to obtain locations in a block. The Laidlaws belonged to a group that included families named Creighton, Darling, McTavish, Scott and Bowman. Other parties were organized by James Hunter, Alexander Stewart, Timothy Street and James McNab. It was apparently decided by the authorities that Esquesing and Chinguacousy Townships be chiefly used for parties of settlers.

Particular mention should be made of one of the parties of settlers since it formed the nucleus of the Protestant Irish community in Esquesing in which Joseph Standish and family were to spend their lives. The leaders of this party were John Beatty, James Beattie, Thomas Reed and Joseph Graham. All were natives of Ireland who in 1818 were living in New York City...

*-Numbering the Survivors, A History of the Standish Family of Ireland, Ontario and Alberta, J. Richard Houston, 1979: Agincourt, Ontario.*

Within a year or two of the settlers arriving officially in 1819, the first meeting of the Ratepayers of the Township of Esquesing was held January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1821, at the home of Joseph and Mary Standish, the population being 424, of which figure 178 were children under 16-years of age. Twelve Town Officers were appointed: James Frazer, Town Clerk; Joseph Standish and Thomas Barbour, Assessors; Thomas Fyffe, Collector; Charles Kennedy, John Stewart, Town Wardens; John McTavish, Donald McKinnon, James Hume, Christopher Cooke, William McKlejohn and Christian Barnes, Pathmasters.

*- A History of St. John's Anglican Church, Stewarttown, Ontario (Town of Esquesing 1821), Lucy E. Emslie: MS 1992*



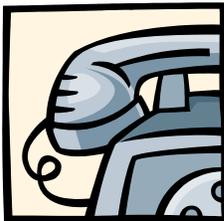


## **ESQUESING HISTORICAL SOCIETY SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS**

**2019**

- Wed. 11     **THE EARLY YEARS OF ESQUESING TOWNSHIP**  
 Sept. 2019     John Mark Rowe begins the celebration of 200 years of settlement by exploring the pre-history, survey and first years of settlement in Esquesing township with a short walk and slide show in the cradle of Esquesing’s history.  
**ST. JOHN’S ANGLICAN CHURCH, 10996 Trafalgar Road, Stewarttown, 7 pm**
- Wed. 9     **THE SETTLEMENTS OF ESQUESING TOWNSHIP**  
 Oct. 2019     Ray Denny will continue the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration by exploring the settlements of the Township from Crewson’s Corners to Whaley’s Corners! What commodity did each community contribute to the economy of the Township?  
**ACTON TOWN HALL, 19 Willow Street, North, Acton, 7:30 p.m.**
- Wed. 13     **EVENTS THAT CHANGED ESQUESING TOWNSHIP**  
 Nov. 2019     Several members of the executive of the EHS will explore events that affected the people of Esquesing over the past 200 years of our history. The plank roads, 1837 Rebellion, Coming of the Railways, WWI, WWII and Regional Government are examples of events to be discussed.  
**KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, 116 Main St., S., Georgetown, 7:30 p.m.**
- Dec. 2019     The Society does not hold a public meeting in December.

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



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
Ray Denny	905 877-3890	Publications
Steve McNamara	519 856-1242	

## Society Notes

### INTERNET CONNECTIONS

<http://esquesinghistoricalsociety.com/> Note the new website address. Send your e-mail to [esquesinghs@gmail.com](mailto:esquesinghs@gmail.com)

### EHS NEWSLETTER

John Mark Rowe prepared this newsletter. 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 currently have 76 members for 2019. Our membership year runs from February. Please encourage others to support the EHS by purchasing a membership. The individual membership rate is \$20. The family or institution rate is \$25. The EHS is still very happy to accept personal cheques from our members. Please note that all cheques must be made payable to "Esquesing Historical Society", fully spelled out. Membership fees can be mailed to our post box or payable by cash or cheque to our membership secretary, David Borrett at a public meeting.

### CANADIANA ON-LINE

<http://online.canadiana.ca/search>

### ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO

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

### EHS ARCHIVES

The Society was not able to secure funding for a student this summer but nevertheless we had two young ladies working in the Archives. The first was Meghan Warnock. Meghan won the EHS History Prize at Christ the King in 2017 and wanted to volunteer in the Archives to get some experience so she could apply to work in her Queen's University Archives. She tackled the Dills Collection donation for us.

The second student was Meghan Headrick, hired by Heritage Halton Hills to work on a barn inventory. She did some photo descriptions for the EHS as well.

We are very pleased by the work completed by the two Meghan's and wish them well in their future endeavours!

### HISTORY PRIZE AWARDED

The EHS once again sponsored a history prize for graduating secondary students at Halton Hills Schools. The award winner gets one of our history publications and \$200. This year's winners were Max Rieger of Acton District High School, Carly Wilson of Georgetown District High School and Brianna Hardie of Christ the King Secondary School. Congratulations!

### 1856 SCHOOL SECTION MAP

In 1856, the County of Halton produced a unique map that lists both the land ownership and school section numbers for the Esquesing Township. It was produced by Charles McCarthy and is a printed map on paper mounted onto linen. It is 26" x 36". It is currently the only known map in existence. The Ontario Archives made a copy of the map for archival purposes.

The map had been in Robert Burnett's private collection until he donated it to the Halton Hills Public Library in December 2017. The Library has recently secured funding to cover the restoration and framing costs. Restoration will be conducted by John Slavin of John Slavin Paper Conservation Ltd. starting in October. His plan includes varnish removal, cleaning and deacidifying the paper map, removal of the linen backing, attaching a new support of Japanese archival paper, with written and photographic documentation. Similar work was done to restore the Tremaine Map. The project is expected to be completed later in 2020. Once restored, the Esquesing Township School Section map will find its home in the Local History Room of the Georgetown Branch of the Library.

### HALTON-PEEL OGS

<https://haltonpeel.ogs.on.ca/>

Sept. 22 -David Hobben, *Pioneers of Halton*, Oakville Library, 120 Navy Street 2-4 p.m.

Oct. 27 -Kristen den Hartog, *Occupied Garden*, Oakville Library 2-4 p.m.

#### **DEVEREAUX HOUSE**

Ann Lawlor at [ann@devereauxhouse.ca](mailto:ann@devereauxhouse.ca)

#### **HALTON HILLS SPORTS MUSEUM**

<http://haltonhillssportsmuseum.blogspot.ca/>

Open Sundays 1-4 p.m.

See the list of Hall of Fame inductees on the next page.

#### **STREETSVILLE HIST. SOCIETY**

The Society Library and Archives are open Wednesdays and Sundays 1-4 p.m. at the Leslie Log Cabin at 4415 Mississauga Road.

Sept. 12 -Matthew Wilkinson, *Giants Amongst Us: Life and Times of Mississauga Legends*, Streetsville United Church @ 7:30

Nov. 21 -Ted Barris, *The Great Escape: A Canadian Story*, Streetsville Legion @ 7:30

#### **BRAMPTON HIST. SOCIETY**

Heart Lake Presbyterian Church at 7:15.

Sept. 18 - David Neelands, *In Search of a Better Life: the Graham-Read Settlements from New York City to Peel County in 1819*.

Oct. 17 - Glenn McFarlane, *His family's 200-year history in New Brunswick*.

#### **MILTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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

Sept. 19 -Cindy Lunau, *Nassagaweya History*

Oct. 17 -John Duignan, *Milton Collectible Memorabilia*

Sept. 8, 15, 22 & 29 -Historic walking tours of Milton at 2p.m. \$10 each.

#### **OAKVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

<https://www.oakvillehistory.org/>

Oct. 26 -3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Family History Fair at Queen Elizabeth Park, 2303 Bridge Road, Oakville from 10-4.

Speaker's Nights are hosted in February, April, May and November.

#### **BURLINGTON HIST. SOCIETY**

Burlington Public Library at 7 p.m.

Sept. 9<sup>th</sup> -Ted Barris, *Rush to Danger*  
Joseph Brant Museum official re-opening on Sept. 15<sup>th</sup>. Admission is FREE!

Oct. 15<sup>th</sup> -TBA

#### **NASAGIWEYA HIST. SOCIETY**

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

#### **TRAFALGAR HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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

Sept. 20<sup>th</sup> -Open Archives 1:30-3:30

Sept. 28 -Family Heritage Fair 10:00

Oct. 1<sup>st</sup> -J.D.M. Stewart, *Being Prime Minister* 7:00

Oct. 18<sup>th</sup> -Open Archives 1:30-3:30

#### **TERRA COTTA HALL**

Terra Cotta Community Hall rentals:

Contact Kathy Atkinson at

[terracottaeventbooking@gmail.com](mailto:terracottaeventbooking@gmail.com)

#### **LOCAL DIGITAL RESOURCES**

Our Digital World, host of Halton Hills newspapers, Halton Images and Halton News hosts newspapers from across Ontario.

You can start searching at:

<https://ourdigitalworld.net/>

#### **SPORTS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES**

The Halton Hills Sports Museum inducted six new members in June. They are Joanne (Bingham) Berentson, Emily Boycott, Mike Knoepfli, Cristy Nurse, Rod Pasma and the Bianchi family of Sunny Acre Farms.

Details are available at

<https://haltonhillssportsmuseum.blogspot.com/>

#### **DOORS OPEN 2019**

Halton Hills joins other Halton Region municipalities in hosting Doors Open this year. Acton properties will be the focus this year, including an historical walk by Scott Somerville. Five Acton properties will be open for a tour on Sunday 29 September.

Details are found at

<https://www.doorsopenontario.on.ca/en/halton-region>

#### **MILLIE McNIVEN PASSES**

Mildred Jane McNiven died peacefully at Bethell Hospice on Friday, April 26, 2019 in her 93rd year. Loving mother of Brent (Caterina) and Don (Gloria). Loved grandma of Colin (Kennedy), Andre, and Paul. Dear

sister of Donald (Pat) and David (Doris) Livingston. Mildred is predeceased by her husband Victor, and by her siblings Emily, Lorraine, Willena and John. She was a member of the Esquesing Historical Society. Interment was at Greenwood Cemetery.

**RUTH McBRIDE DIES**

Ruth McBride died on Sunday August 11th, 2019 at her home in Limehouse. Ruth, in her 84th year, sadly missed by Norm, Dean, Dave, Glen Dredge and their families, Mary, Hugh and Jim Hunter. Cremation has taken place. A Celebration of Ruth's Life will take place at a later date. She was a member of the Esquesing Historical Society. In memory contributions to the C.N.I.B would be appreciated.

**JIM DILLS HAS DIED**

Jim Dills (1930-2019) died in Milton over the summer. Jim was an original founder of the Milton Historical Society and was the publisher and editor of the Milton Champion and along with his brother Dave Dills also published the Acton Free Press and Georgetown Independent. He was a great friend of local history.

**EHS SUPPORTS NAME CHANGE**

The EHS wrote a letter in support of a proposal to rename Dayfoot Drive Park as Henry Thomas Shepherd, M.B.E. Park. Henry Shepherd (1895-1960) of Stewarttown worked at Domtar Paper and served in both World Wars. He was awarded the M.B.E. (Later replaced by the Order of Canada), was Georgetown Fire Chief and was a founding member of the Georgetown Legion.

**CREDIT VALLEY TRAIL**

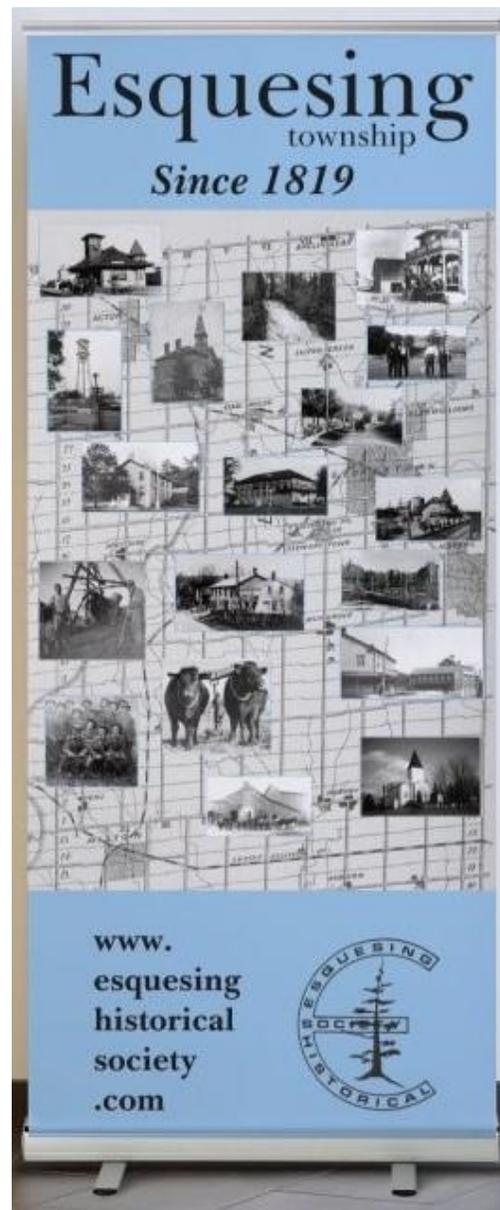
Planning a foot path along the Credit River from Orangeville to Port Credit is a daunting task that volunteers have been working on for some years now. The first section is ready to open at Glen Williams. First Steps Along the Path celebration will take place on Friday 27 September at the Glen Ball Park. It begins at 3:30, opening at 4:30

followed by walking tours of the trail and of the village.

**EHS MARKS TOWNSHIP'S 200<sup>th</sup>**

The EHS will have a display marking the township's 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the History Room of the Georgetown Library this Fall. Try and stop by and let us know what you think!

We have also created the pop-up banner pictured below for use at our meetings and other events. It is currently on display in the History Room.



# The Development of Communities

Ray Denny

In 1819, many settlers began settling the newly surveyed land of Esquesing Township. There were eleven concessions of thirty-two lots which translated into approximately six hundred lots available for occupation in the of this new township. The settlers began the arduous task of building of a house (often log), building of a small barn and the clearing of trees from the land in order to plant crops to sustain themselves and their animals. They were also mandated to clear trees in front of their farms so a grid of roads could be developed to connect them to their neighbours, mills, supplies and general communication with the outside world. These roads were very rough and barely navigable; travelling on them was a nightmare.

The settlers became dependent on the people living closest to themselves. As a result small communities began to develop, especially near rivers where mills could be established. In addition, many of the communities became a centre for church, school, a general store and even hotels. There are sixteen such communities in Esquesing. The history of thirteen of these communities has been produced as pamphlets by EHS members over the past twenty-five years and are obtainable for free. The pamphlets are also accessible from the EHS web site

<http://esquesinghistoricalsociety.com> They are located in the menu **Communities**.

**Acton** [The Historic Town of Acton](#)

**Ashgrove** [The Historic Hamlet of Ashrove](#)

**Ballinafad** [The Historic Hamlet of Ballinafad](#)

**Georgetown** [Historic Georgetown](#)

**Glen Lawson** [Hamlet of Glen Lawson](#)

**Glen Williams** [Historic Glen Williams](#)

**Hornby** [Hornby Gateway to Two Townships](#)

**Limehouse** [The Historic Village of Limehouse](#)

**Norval** [Norval on the Credit](#)

**Silver Creek** [Silver Creek](#)

**Speyside** [Historic Speyside](#)

**Stewarttown** [Historic Stewarttown](#)

**Terra Cotta** [The Historic Village of Terra Cotta](#)

One of the communities not listed above is **Peru** which is located in the area of Country Heritage Park on Lots 2 & 3 on the First Line near Steeles Avenue, the southern boundary of Esquesing Township. It boasted of a sawmill on the Sixteen Mile Creek, a tannery, and a large ashery and soap factory. A neighbouring community was **Milton Heights** where the clay pits created a brick-making business at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both of these communities eventually became part of The Town of Milton.



Former Esquesing School Section #17, Milton Heights. EHS18588

Roads leading south to Lake Ontario were very important. It was along these by which the products of the settlements were brought down for sale and export in exchange for much sought

after cash. There were two main roads: the 7<sup>th</sup> Line or Trafalgar Rd. leading to Oakville and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Line leading to Milton, Bronte and Oakville. Barrels of flour and potash, frozen carcasses of hogs and quarters of beef were transported especially in the winter months.

To assist the settlers in their arduous journey, there were twenty-four taverns established along Trafalgar Road between Ballinafad and Oakville supplying watering troughs for horses, warm fires and whiskey. Some of the communities on this road thrived as a result.

**Ashgrove** was one of those communities situated at the intersection of Trafalgar Road and 10 Sideroad. It has been the hub of a thriving community since 1820. It was first known as Leonard's Corners after Edward Leonard, who purchased property on the south corner and built a hotel, naming it after himself. The first



Former Esquesing School Section #3, Ashgrove. EHS11517

post office in Esquesing township was in the store of Henry Fyfe at lot 9, concession 7. When the property was sold to Joseph Ruddell in 1840, the post office was moved to Stewarttown. In 1852 the local people requested their own post office. They named it Ashgrove for the grove of black ash there. In the same year Mr. Kent established a hotel on the east corner, later called the Esquesing House. It had a stable on the ground floor with an outside staircase to upstairs rooms. The weigh scales, located here, were a boon to farmers selling their grain. In 1871 John Alexander built a house, a hotel and stable on the south corner. The hotel was a stagecoach stop needed for a change of horses. With the railway expanding, the stage coach was phased out and hotel accommodation needs dwindled.

The power of electricity was soon evident. The 25<sup>th</sup> May 1899 *Free Press* reported, “By the sagging of an electric light pole, allowing the electric and telephone wires to come into contact, Dr. McKeague's telephone burned out on Fri night. Manager McGrail's time clock was also burned out. The Council had all the posts straightened up and tamped in on Monday.”

Situated on the other main route, Hwy 25, at the corner of #15 Sideroad half way between the towns of Acton and Milton was once the thriving village of **Speyside**. Speyside was named after the River Spey in Scotland and in its early days, the creek tumbled over the rocks creating a miniature waterfall. Today it is marked by an abandoned store and gasoline station.

A century ago, the picture was very different. Speyside at one time housed two hotels, a tannery, sawmills, shingle mill, a large stone quarry, a couple of general stores, a village hall, its own post office and a considerable number of houses. In fact, the registered plan of the village shows nine streets.



Ronny McIsaac leaves Speyside store in 1963. EHS18898

on a sign affixed to a post on the road nearest to their location.

Former Esquesing School Section #10, Dufferin, c. 1950. EHS18897



The high elevation of the area along Highway #25 towards Milton gives a spectacular view of the surrounding countryside. Indeed, today on a clear day, from this vantage point, one has a wonderful view of the skyline of Toronto, including the CN Tower. Dufferin School is located near St. Helena Road, an extremely steep road off Concession 2 where it circles the edge of the escarpment. The stone from James Hume's quarry was used in 1866 to build Boston Presbyterian Church on the 3rd Line as well as local area bridges.

Some of these communities flourished and exist today as the Towns of Acton and Georgetown . Some grew into sizeable hamlets such as Glen Williams and Norval. Many changed from thriving industrial & commercial centres to a concentration of houses. Some, unfortunately, will slowly be absorbed into new twenty-first century areas of growth and expansion. Presently, however, all of these communities still exist and are identified by their historic name