

HERITAGE HAPPENINGS



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>Our Heritage Society</i>	1
<i>Heritage Paper—St. Thomas Catholic school</i>	2
<i>Newspaper snips</i>	4
<i>Treasures from the Archives</i>	5
<i>Threads through the Past—Mary Hopkins</i>	6
<i>President's Message</i>	8
<i>Local Society Websites</i>	8
<i>In Memoriam</i>	8

What is our Heritage Society?

The past

When we formed almost 50 years ago, The Waterdown-East Flamborough Heritage Society established a mandate that still serves us today: to record local history through the preservation of materials, maintain a permanent archives facility to store and make those materials available to the public, increase awareness of local history through publications and meetings, and network with other groups and government agencies to promote the Society's objectives. The Society was also involved in establishing heritage designations and protecting local historical buildings and landmarks.

To that end, dozens of dedicated volunteers pitched in to organize activities and events, ranging from an annual strawberry social, guided walks, monthly public meetings, and the fall Victorian Festival. Society volunteers also undertook the role of the Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee (LACAC) responsible for cataloging local historical properties – something that hadn't been well organized before the passage of the Ontario Heritage Act in 1974.



The present

Today, the Society's mandate remains unchanged. The Flamborough Archives is a state-of-the art facility that boasts a wealth of documents, photographs and other materials. We regularly produce publications that highlight local history. We host public meetings and an annual book fair (in non-pandemic times). Our volunteer archivist continues to field dozens of inquiries each week and connects with area associations and municipal departments on heritage matters.

But the landscape around us has changed. Like many other non-profit agencies and service clubs, we do not have the number of volunteers we once did. Flamborough – notably, Waterdown – has undergone huge growth and demographics shift. The local town council was replaced by the City of Hamilton, which has a small staff that oversees heritage issues and

Continued on page 4

WEFHS Board 2020-2021

The position of Treasurer remains open. Please contact us if you are interested—or know of someone who is.

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St. Thomas Catholic Elementary School, Waterdown

Heritage Paper # 293

Although Waterdown officially achieved parish status in 1950, the local Catholic community had been established for more than a century under the care of St. Mary's Parish in Hamilton. The first Catholic pioneers were served by visiting priests from Dundas, who celebrated Mass in private homes until the first small wooden church was constructed in 1846. In 1877, Freelton was given its first resident pastor and Waterdown was attached as a mission, an arrangement that lasted until 1950.

In response to the growing local population and Catholic community, Bishop J.F. Ryan of the Hamilton Diocese established Waterdown as a separate parish in 1950 and named Rev. Joseph P. Cremmen as the first pastor. Fr. Cremmen arranged for temporary accommodation at Notre Dame Academy on Snake Road until 1952, when the rectory was constructed next to the church on Flamboro Street.

Fr. Cremmen's first order of business was to organize parishioners to form a Separate School Board in 1950 with the intent of establishing a new school to serve local families, who up until

that time had been sending their children to the two-room day school operated by the School Sisters of Notre Dame on the grounds of the convent on Snake Road. Joining chair Irving Weeks on the new board were Stan Savage, Fr. Cremmen, John Burjaw, Cecil King, Francis Redding and John McDonnell.

St. Thomas Catholic Elementary School was constructed on land on the west side of the church property and opened on 26 August, 1951, with 68 pupils enrolled. Ceremonies were presided over by Bishop Ryan.

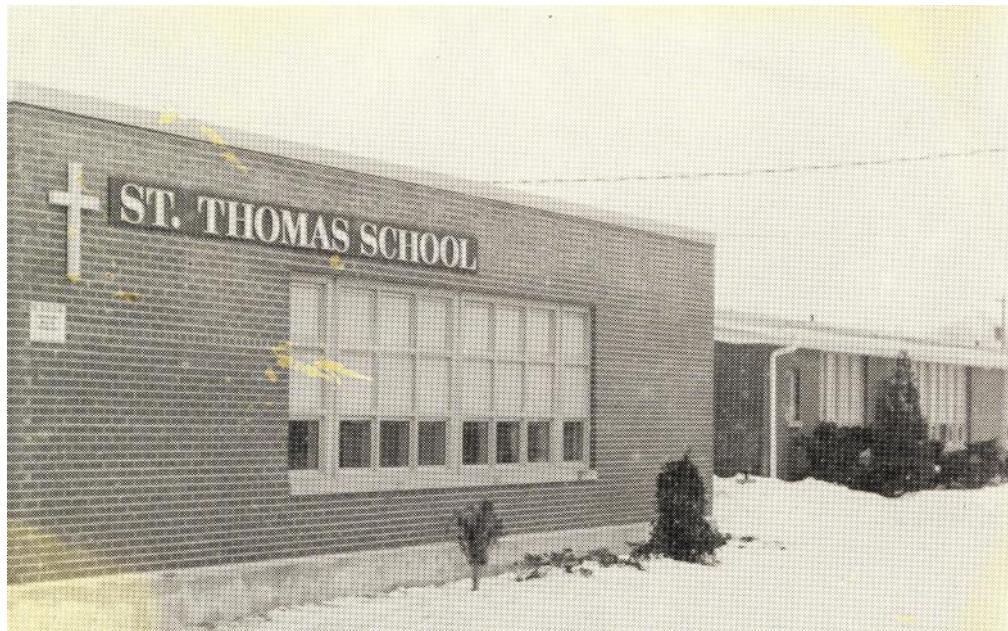
'Very practical'

The one-storey building was designed by Hamilton architectural firm William R. Souter and Associates and construction was contracted to The National Bridge and Building Co. of Hamilton. Excerpts from the Canadian Register (25 August, 1951) described the three-room school as "very practical," and featured "many modern appointments and the latest in equipment."

The school also boasted notable features, such as a spacious recreation room in the basement, lavatories that possessed the latest in equipment, and marboleum floors installed by the T. Eaton Co., in a different colour motif in each room. The school's interior was decorated in light pastel shades to



The rear view of the new St. Thomas School, 1951. Waterdown Review photo



The front of St. Thomas School, circa 1990.
Waterdown Review photo

Below, the condominium development on the former St. Thomas Catholic Elementary School site.

prevent eyestrain, and instead of traditional blackboards, greenboards were installed that, with the use of yellow chalk, aimed to be more restful on the eyes of the students.

During the 1980s the school underwent renovations to add a gymnasium, library and classrooms to accommodate the increased number of students, and by the 1990s as many as 12 portables were installed on the property to provide classrooms for the more than 700 children enrolled at the school.

Anniversary celebration

St. Thomas school celebrated its 50th anniversary with an open house in 2001, the same year Guardian Angels Catholic Elementary School opened on Centre Road at the north end of the village. While this alleviated the overcrowding at the Barton Street site, the community was still growing. In 2008, the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board approved the construction of a new St. Thomas elementary school and by 2011, work had begun on the new site on Skinner Road on the east side of the village. The two-story, 64,000 square-foot building celebrated its official opening in 2013. It features 25 classrooms and the latest in education technology.

The Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School



declared the original school on Barton Street to be surplus property in 2012 and sold it to a private developer, who demolished the building and constructed townhomes and a six-storey condominium apartment building on the 5.34-acre site.

Sources:

The Canadian Register, August 25, 1951,

Flamborough Review

City of Hamilton Planning and Economic Development Department documents

St. Thomas Church Parish Life History, Catholic Women's League, 1971

FLAMBOROUGH HEADLINES

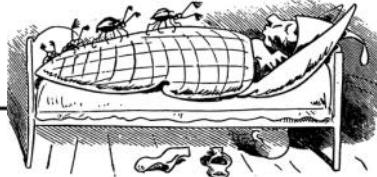


While the aim of a newspaper is to inform, sometimes a local paper just has to slip in something lighthearted.

Excitement at Carlisle

One of the worst fires that has ever occurred broke out last Tuesday in the Beachgrove Settlement. There were more lives lost than in the Great Chicago fire and its origin more pathetic. Fire Marshals George Cummins and Hamilton Kerr noticed smoke coming from the direction of a settlers home and jumping into their motor fire extinguisher were promptly on the job trying to save the burg. Upon arriving the marshals found a smoldering heap burning on the lawn. They found three men, one of them John Barleycorn, lying on the ground unable to crawl into the hut. The Marshals enquired as to how the fire started and with tears in his eyes the old settler intimated that the bed bugs were so bad that they could stand it no longer and had brought the old straw tick down the winding stairway and were burning the blankety, blankety beggars alive. It is estimated that 2000 lives were lost in the great fire.

Waterdown Review, August 7, 1919



Our Heritage Society— Continued from page 1

makes decisions on historical properties while relying on the work and expertise of volunteer associations like ours.

The future

Technology has also had a huge impact on the Society's activities. Thanks to social media, more people than ever are interested in local history and sharing photos and family information. We have also been active online, posting content and interacting on Facebook and Instagram to provide information.

As we (hopefully) emerge from the COVID-19 lockdown and get back to organizing in-person programming and events, we hope to harness this enthusiasm and attract members and volunteers who can help take our history into the next 50 years – and beyond. Thank you to everyone who has renewed their Flamborough Heritage Society membership – we look forward to seeing you soon!

TREASURES FROM THE ARCHIVES

Bob Lalonde, one of our archives volunteers, usually spends his time researching W.W. I veterans for our collection but has also done research on other notable Flamborough Families. Recently he brought in another project he has been working 'on and off for twenty or thirty years'. This is a fascinating history of electricity in the area, starting with a demonstration of an electric light in a Hamilton telegraph office in January 1849 and ending with the creation of the Flamborough Hydro Electric Commission in 1981. He has also included information on Thomas A. Edison, , Sir Humphrey Davy, Nikola Tesla, various local Power and Electrical companies which came and went over the years, newspaper clippings and Waterdown PUC Annual Reports.

ELECTRICITY COMES TO WATERDOWN



The Adam Beck stations as seen from the air; the northern dam (nearest) is Adam Beck I and the southern is Adam Beck II. — Wikipedia

*Researched & Compiled by Robert A. Lalonde
Waterdown, Ontario*

'On Monday the 18th of September, 1911, a political rally was held at the Waterdown Roller Rink for Gordon C. Wilson, the Conservative candidate for Wentworth County. Both the candidate and Sir Adam Beck addressed the crowd. The building was illuminated by hydro and it was officially the first night on which the Village of Waterdown was lit by hydro electric power.'

THREADS THROUGH THE PAST

By Lyn Lunsted

Mary Hopkins

January 27th, 2021 marked the 100th anniversary of the Grand Opening of Mary Hopkins Public School in Waterdown. Originally named the Waterdown Public School, it was also known as Union School S.S. # 3. It had been built to alleviate the overcrowding and dangerous conditions that existed in the Waterdown Public and Continuation School in Sealey Park – conditions so bad that the School Inspector had condemned the building.

The new Waterdown Public School was designed by architect J.A. Armes of Hamilton and built by a local contractor. The opening featured speeches by many distinguished guests, prayers of dedication, solos, recitations, Flag Drill, piano duets and a closing chorus. The newspaper article describing the event decreed that “No small town in Ontario has better, and possibly not its equal.”



With the growth of the village, a second school was built in 1964 and the name of the Union School S.S. # 3 was changed to Mary Hopkins Public School in honour of Miss Mary Hopkins who taught in Waterdown’s first school.

But who was Mary Hopkins?

She is decidedly elusive. The only original references to her in our Archives are from two articles. One was written by Justus A. Griffin in 1895 called “Waterdown and its early Settlers.” In his reminiscences, he says that, “In 1815 there was a log schoolhouse on the corner of Dundas

Street and Mill Street, in which Miss Mary Hopkins was teacher. Miss Hopkins afterwards married Elijah Merritt of Smithville.”

George Douglas Griffin wrote a paper for the Wentworth Historical Society which was published in their Journal and Transactions Vol. 2, 1899. He writes the same thing but also includes a couple of extra sentences saying, “She was not of the Hopkins family that lived in Nelson. I think she was a sister of the Hopkins who owned a farm west of the McMonies farm.” He also adds that, “The school was not kept constantly and for part of the time Mr. Brown sent his children to Hannahsville.”

There is a notation in a file that says she left to be married in 1823 – but is this correct? Teaching for eight years in the prime of her life seems to be a very long time for a young woman to remain single during this time period.

Charles and James McMonies owned land on the 4th Concession in East Flamborough – but a check of the Land Abstract books does not show any lot on the 4th Concession being owned by a Hopkins during the 1800s.

So where did she come from? And why was she hired to teach the children of Alexander Brown, along with others in the village? Did Alexander know her father? Her brother? Was she such an exceptional teacher that he wanted her to teach his children? George Griffin wrote that the school was not “kept constantly,” so where did Mary Hopkins go when she was not teaching?

Alexander Brown and Merren Grierson were married on July 28, 1806. By 1815 they had three or six children, depending on which Ancestry family tree one wishes to use, but they were all quite young – so why would Alexander hire a teacher for his children who were mostly under the age of seven? There were presumably some other children in the settlement so perhaps he felt strongly enough about education to set up a

school. It is interesting that the Waterdown High School Experience '76 research project on Waterdown schools contains a note that there was a charge to attend this school.

If we go at this puzzle from the other side — the existence of Elijah Merritt — then there are some clues. His family was from New York and settled in the Smithville area. He was in the War of 1812, as was Alexander Brown but they were in different Regiments. Perhaps their paths overlapped.

An Elijah Merritt married a Mary Hopkins in 1819. Is this person 'our' Mary Hopkins? Maybe — or She was born in Caistorville on December 31, maybe not — but it is a starting point. More 1790. According to some sources Elijah was also born in Caistorville on August 31, 1792. Or perhaps Fishkill N.Y. The inconsistencies of Hopkins was happy and content with her genealogy! They went on to have possibly seven children between 1820 and 1836.

- ◆ Esther Merritt (1822 – 1899)
- ◆ James Sutton Merritt (1825 - 1907)
- ◆ Alpheus Merritt (1829-1880)

- ◆ Theodore Merritt (1830 – 1863)
- ◆ Robert Hopkins Merritt (1832 – 1877)
- ◆ John Price Merritt (1833 – 1904)
- ◆ Valmer Merritt (1834-1897)

Some sources also list a Elijah Harvey Merritt (1831 – 1884).

This Mary Hopkins Merritt died June 15, 1839 and Elijah died in 1867. Both are buried in the Merritt Settlement Cemetery, West Lincoln, Niagara Regional Municipality.



**The Flamborough
Heritage Society**

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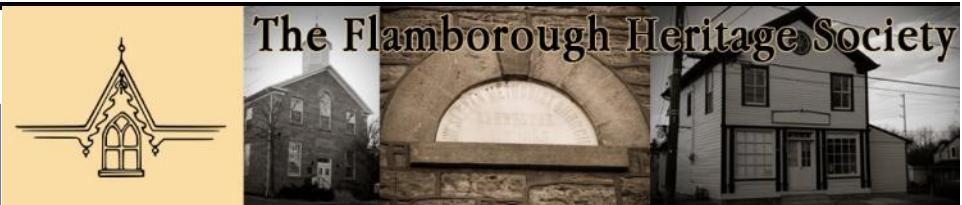
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Mary Beth Kennedy

Meghan Martin
Keri Raphael

Kim Hirst

Lyn Lunsted, Archivist



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Just over five years ago, the Board of Directors had a Strategic Planning Session to figure out where we wanted to take the Society in the future. This was at a time when the Archives was waiting to get into the new Waterdown Library. As we moved into the new facility, it seemed natural that our focus turned to more research and education. This focus is reflected through the numerous books we have published and reissued since then. However, it has recently been suggested that we are getting away from the original objectives of the Society and we should refocus our efforts back to them.

The Waterdown-East Flamborough Heritage Society is closing in on 50 years. Do we continue going down the road that worked in the past and wonder why no one new is coming through the door? Or do we look at reinventing ourselves for the next generation? Members of the Board of Directors have been wracking our brains over these issues for many years now. Attendance at Public Meetings was down, so we thought maybe a different day of the week would help. However, a suitable location could not be found. We have tried different themes over the past few years for our annual Book Fair, but we still see our numbers going down. We have seen increased interest in local history on social media, but it has not translated into larger crowds or new members.

Where do we go? We would like to hear from our membership as to which direction we should be heading. What ideas do you have to help increase attendance and membership or new projects the Society can look into?

Chris Rivait, President

AREA SOCIETY WEBSITES

The **Ancaster Township Historical Society** -
www.ancasterhistory.ca

The **Burlington Historical Society** -
www.burlingtonhistorical.ca.

The **Dundas Valley Historical Society** -
Www.dundashistory.ca

The **Grimsby Historical Society** -
Grimsby Historical Society.

The **Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society**-
www.hamiltonheritage.ca

The **Head-of-the-Lake Historical Society** -
Head of the Lake Historical Society

The **United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada, Hamilton Branch** - wwwUEL.com

The **West Lincoln Historical Society** - www.wlhs.info

