

Osgoode Township

Historical Society & Museum

Vernon School
P.O. Box 83 - Vernon, Ontario
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← Newsletter →

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Portraying The Past

President's Report

Since our last newsletter we celebrated Heritage Day on 18 February, with a record crowd in attendance. It was most encouraging to see so many of our old friends and neighbours turning out because, after all, the museum is FOR the people, and it only exists because so many of you have contributed so much in so many ways over the years.

We anticipate a very busy summer season. Our new building is to be completed by the contractor by June 30, but that will still leave us with landscaping and some indoor work before we can have an official opening. The electrical wiring has been completed, but cannot be connected until soil conditions permit installation of underground cable.

Official opening to be announced.

BOB USHER

A Glimpse Into The Past

This month (April) is the anniversary of the assassination of a Canadian statesman at the height of his career, D'Arcy McGee. This event, April 6, 1868 culminates from the spring of 1866 and kept Ottawa in a turmoil with reports of invasions and rumours of civil strife. The source of the unrest was the Fenian brotherhood, a revolutionary secret society composed of Irish Americans whose aim it was to conquer Canada and make it a base of operations for the liberation of Ireland. The real scare came in June 1 of 1866 when a troop of 800 Fenians under command of John O'Neill slipped across the Niagara river by boat and landed at Fort Erie. By the time the Canadians rallied and forced retreat, 9 were dead and 44 wounded. Ottawa was ready for further insurrection, the streets were cramed with soldiers. The Carleton Blazers, a sharp shot troupe, were mobilized at the Drill Shed on Nicholas Street.

The Fenians found their most dangerous opponent not among the enemies but in one of their own kind, a former revolutionary turned politician. Largely respected and a speaker who held his audience spellbound, the very name for many had become synonymous for Confederation. Sandra Gwyn in her book The Private Capital states "More than MacDonald, more even than Cartier who never got on with McGee, it was McGee who became Confederation's golden tongued prophet." McGee fearing insurrection at least as much as actual invasion kept up relentless attacks on the Fenians.

By spring 1868, Fenianism was much in the past. McGee was no longer a Member of Parliament, having withdrawn for an additional French Canadian representative that Cartier insisted upon. Neither his enthusiasm for his cause nor his enthusiasm for Confederation had waned. Near midnight on Monday, April 6, 1868, he rose to deliver a defence of national unity. Sandra Gwyn describes that night much like the following. After his speech, he put on his overcoat and new white tophat and paused at the front door to light a cigar. He walked down the Hill then turned to walk down Sparks Street to his digs at Widow Trotter's boarding house.

Just as McGee stooped to insert his latch key, a shot rang out. He fell over backwards onto the wooden sidewalk. There he lay without moving, in a widening puddle of blood.

Rumour of plots and counterplots and accomplices surged through parlours and East Block corridors. Among the half dozen Fenian sympathizers rounded up after the murder was the tailor, Patrick Whelan. While it is not known if he actually shot McGee, bullets in his belongings matched the bullet found lodged in Mrs. Trotter's door. The outcome of the September trial was a foregone conclusion, after a two week trial he was found guilty and was hanged.

The boarding house where McGee had been living actually belonged to Queen's Printer George Desbarats which included his Print Works. The planks of the wooden sidewalk now saturated with blood therefore also belonged to Mr. Desbarats. At the request of the Mayor of Ottawa, Mr. Desbarats allowed the city to take up the planks as it would have been a desecration to have them walked upon. Desbarats also put up a plaque to McGee on the front wall of his Print Works. This building burned to the ground some 9 months later, rumoured to have been lit by the Fenians as an act of revenge. The plaque to McGee was found afterwards when foundations were being laid for the building which housed the Ottawa Citizen until the 1970's.

Immediately following the assassination George E. Cartier is said to have given the most eloquent tribute in which he proposed a state pension for McGee's wife and daughters and a state funeral at public expense.

The Kemptville Advance, June 20, 1895 reports the respective public expense of the funerals of Sir John A. (1891) and G.E. Cartier (1873) and recalls that "the Government paid \$295.00 on account of D'Arcy McGee but that of course was part payment."

ANN LEIGHTON KYLE

Ella Campbell 1876-1955

Ella Jean Campbell was rather unique in that she trained for nursing at a time when that opportunity was available to very few girls from rural communities; and that she served as a nurse in the Army Medical Corps in World War I, which also made her one of a select group.

The second of six children born to John Munn Campbell and Esther Jean Kennedy, she entered the world at Vernon on Feb. 20, 1876. The family lived at what is now 7811 Rideau St. The house is a fine example of late 19th century frame architecture, and its condition is a credit to the present owners.

Her father owned the flour mill on the property now occupied by the museum, as well as the farm at Lot 43 Con 6.

No doubt Ella attended public school at Vernon, but we have no record available, nor have we evidence of any secondary education.

In January 1903 Ella was enrolled in the New York City Training School for Nurses. She graduated on the 1st day of January 1906. By this time her father had died (1894) as had her brother David Archibald (1881-1903). In 1912 the widow Campbell married James York, son of Henry York and Margaret Brown. It was probably this time that the family moved to Ottawa where they lived at 191 Sunnyside St. Ella may have nursed in Ottawa during this period but we have no records to that effect, but we do know that she left that address to enrol in the Army Medical Corps on 8 April 1916. Her attestation form shows that her mother was once again a widow.

By 3 June Ella was nursing in a convalescent hospital at Ramsgate on the East coast of Kent. By now she was 40 years of age and pretty close to the upper age limit for nursing in a war time hospital with a large case load. One would expect that she found it a bit exhausting.

On 23 December 1916 Ella was posted to No. 2 Canadian General Hospital on the coast of France. A huge complex where casualties were often received directly from the first-aid posts behind the front lines. This would be a different aspect of nursing, complete with blood, mud, filthy uniforms etc, and it proved to be more than the poor wee soul could handle. Ten days after leaving England she was "sick listed" back to London where she was declared to be no longer fit for overseas service. She returned to Canada and was discharged for medical reasons on 17 December 1917.

It appears that the family moved back to Vernon after the war. Folks who remember the family recall that Glen and Jim lived with Ella and her mother, and that the boys periodically went off to the U.S. to work. Those who knew Ella in those years did not recall that she was ever employed at nursing full time, but that she often rendered first-aid. One said that she had sewed up a cut in his scalp, remarking that she did it well, but used a very blunt needle. Others recalled that she was always neatly dressed, always appeared to be in a hurry, and attended the Presbyterian church regularly, was sometimes a bit gruff and appeared rather eccentric.

Ella died in Winchester Hospital on 29 June 1955 and lies on the slope of Springhill Cemetary with her parents and three of her brothers. Her life was not spectacular, but it was a bit different, she may have been gruff and eccentric, but no doubt she conducted her life according to the dictates of her conscience. She was part of the Vernon scene and deserves a few lines in our history.

BOB USHER

Notes of Interest

Sir Winston Churchill, as a young man was saved from drowning by a farm boy. During World war II, after meeting with Allied leaders Mr. Stalin and Mr. Roosevelt he came down with a severe case of pneumonia, he was saved once again by the same farm boy - Dr. Fleming, world renown inventor of penicillin.

If you have not renewed your membership, this will be your last newsletter.

The paper reads, "DOW, Jennie Hill. In hospital February 13, 1989. Jennie Hume of Metcalfe in her 84th year. Beloved wife of the late William Dow." Mrs. Dow (Jennie to many of us) was a founding Director of the New Horizons Historical group (first meeting dated November 23, 1972), later to be known as the Osgoode Twp. Historical Society. Jennie, wife and mother, school teacher for many years, active member of her Church, School, Metcalfe Women's Institute, Vernon's Gay Nineties group, volunteer, Osgoode Care Centre, etc. Treasurer of the Osgoode Twp. Historical Society. With fond memories, I can say I knew this Dynamic Little woman.

MICHAEL DALEY

*The Clock of life is wound but once
And no man has the power
To tell just when the hands will stop
On what day - or what hour.*

*Now is the only time you have
So live it with a will
Don't wait until Tomorrow
The hands may then be still.*

In Search of Their Roots

January 1973, my wife informed me she wanted to take her parents - Mr. and Mrs. Bill Thompson - to Ireland (both over 80 years of age). My arguments that we couldn't afford the Trip, and I couldn't leave the cows were futile. I was still saying no when she brought home the airline tickets, but that was the spark that created the urge to learn of my Forefathers, and the land from which they came, a visit to the National Archives to learn of the past. I was informed by Mary Conlin (archivist) at the museum of a retired school teacher in Osgoode Township, an expert on genealogy of pioneer families- Elizabeth Stuart. Thus it was that I found myself attending the fifth meeting of the Osgoode Twp. New Horizons Group (senior citizens) March 9, 1973 at the home of Miss Jessie Robertson in Vernon.

March 15, 1973, my wife and I, her parents, left by plane from Montreal airport (snow on the ground), flying across that vast expanse of water to Shanon Airport, County Limerick, Ireland. We were greeted by a soft spring rain falling gently on lush green fields. We had returned to the land our forefathers had left so many years before.

Returning from the Emerald Isle, England, and the land of the heather I was propelled even deeper into the fascinating world of history and genealogy. I would like to share with you, some of the exhilarating moments I have experienced over the last number of years while researching my own family, and many others of Irish descent. Researching church, census, records, land records, cemeteries, the reading of old wills (a will often times gives you names of relatives that you didn't know you had, or they were just never mentioned), talking to Senior Citizens are great sources of information.

And now picture with me if you will, the year 1871; the place, Old Prescott Road (Regional Road 25) in Osgoode Twp. The homes of our pioneer families (two brothers).

John McEvoy Anastasia Powers
Lot 20 Con 3

Michael McEvoy Mary Castican
Lot 29 Con 2

In the spring of 1871 Edmond McEvoy, eldest son of John and Anastasia McEvoy and his first cousin, Edward Patrick McEvoy, son of Michael McEvoy and Mary Castican, along with their wives and families, left Osgoode searching perhaps for greener fields or a better way of life, they travelled together by train to Chicago where Edward Patrick his wife Catherine Conway, travelled first by rail to Algoma, Iowa, and then by covered wagon, north and west to Emmetsburgh, Iowa. In 1870 two Conway brothers had left Osgoode (East 1/2 of Lot 23 Con. 2) and settled there so that the McEvoy family had a place to reside when they arrived. A place later called Osgoode!

Edmond and his wife Mary Kelly interested in cattle travelled further west, settled in the Missouri Valley, Iowa close to the Omaha Market running water and shade, all the advantages in the cattle business.

A letter dated Feb. 7, 1977 reads, Catholic Church Osgoode Ontario, from Overland Park, Kansas, requesting a copy of the Baptismal certificate of my great grandfather James Joseph McEvoy, born April 5, 1866 Osgoode, son of Edward Patrick McEvoy and Catherine Conway, signed Mrs. Deborah Abbot. I answered that letter and received a quick response from a young woman, married 23 years of age, researching her family history and had come to a dead end. I too had been researching the McEvoy Families, and was able to respond with some informative information of her Osgoode Connection that spanned over 100 years and more, and she in turn shared with me what she knew of her Branch, the bits and pieces were forming a pattern, like a giant jigsaw puzzle. When I received a letter dated April 2, 1978, a happy and excited woman, they were expecting their second child, and were moving into their own home, stating she would write to me when they were settled. Shortly after receiving that letter a violent storm swept across the State of Kansas, lives were lost etc. This young woman vanished as quickly, as if I had never known her.

September 1978 a middle age couple drove into our yard, Alice Lethbridge, Great Great Granddaughter of John McEvoy and Annastasia Powers, and her husband Hugh from Flint Michigan, in search of her roots, they had found their way to the Cemetary in Enniskerry. somebody sent them to me, at that point in time I was able to contribute quite a bit of information. Mrs. Lethbridge later compiled a History of her McEvoy's Branch. A copy of which is in our Township Museum. I informed her of the contact with Deborah Abbot. she later tried to trace her but to no avail.

A letter dated Feb. 23, 1986 to the Osgoode Township Historical Society was forwarded to me. Deborah Abbot of Bolington Illinois (alive and well) having taken time from her research to have a family, now three girls and one boy, and having moved a number of times in eight years she misplaced my address. In September 1986 Deborah Abbot her husband and 4 children arrived unexpectedly at our home. I gave them a tour of the McEvoy (former) Residence and visited our museum. They continued on to St. Columbia, and St. Scholastique Quebec where the McEvoy's settled before coming to Osgoode. I informed her of Alice Lethbridge descendant of John and Annastasia McEvoy. They have now shared their Genealogy on their McEvoy connection.

On or about Feb. 4, 1988 I received a phone call from Matt O'Dell of Butte Montana, searching his McEvoy - Conway connection. Matt was born near Osgoode, in Palo Alto Co., Iowa, a community formed in the 1870's by a group of Catholic Irishmen - Conway's McEvoy's

who had emigrated from Osgoode, Canada. Mr. O'Dell, retired, phoned three McEvoy numbers in Osgoode, two no answer, the third Manning McEvoy, searching for his Osgoode connection. Manning informed him he was in the right area, but he referred him to me for information. We shared family geneology, and I in turn referred him to the above mentioned Deborah Abbot and Alice Lethbridge.

It is with a sense of Pride that I acknowledge the fact that the records, compiled by members of the Township Historical Society over the years have been instrumental in providing a common bond between Deborah Abbot of Salt Lake City, Utah, Alice Lethbridge of Flint Michigan, and now Matt O'Dell of Butte Montana. Members of the Historical Society have responded many times to similar requests from across this continent, and around the world.

MICHAEL DALEY

Canadian Farm Toys

For many young Canadians the toy tractors they played with as youngsters were handmade by father or grandfather. Store-bought tractors were not common and most were imported from the USA or Europe, as with most metal toys. It was only in the early 1950's that Canadian-made farm toys became available. A company in Windsor, Ontario - "Lincoln Specialties" - began making metal toys, mostly trucks of various sorts but also airplanes, construction toys, and tractors. The most common of the five different tractors made was the Massey-Harris 44. This tractor was available with a front-end loader or a bulldozer blade and could be accompanied by a Massey-Harris grain wagon, manure spreader, disc or drag harrow, or a mower. In my search for Canadian-made toys, I have found two Massey-Harris 44's and a grain wagon at a garage sale in Osgoode. But I have never seen the other Lincoln tractors; the Cockshutt 30, Oliver 77, a Minneapolis-Moline row crop and a Farmall M. I would be interested in hearing from anyone who has any of these Canadian tractors and could help me in researching the history of Canadian toys.

DAVID GRAY (821-2640)

The Last Will And Testament of William McGirr

Our president Bob Usher in striving to learn something of the life of the farm family who dwelt on the property prior to him purchasing th same, came up with this interesting document.

THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF WILLIAM MCGIRR - 1873.

This instrument witnesseth that I, William McGirr of the Township of Osgoode in the county of Carleton and the province of Ontario, - Farmer. Being of sound mind, memory and understanding, and knowing that it is appointed unto all men once to die, do make and declare this to be my Last Will and Testament hereby revoking all former Wills and Testamentary documents heretofore by me made.

My will is first that I give my soul to God who gave it, and my flesh to the earth from whence it came, and as touching my world effects I give demise and dispose thereof as follows:

That my Funeral charges and just debts shall be paid from my personal effects by my executors as hereinafter named.

I give and bequeath to my son Robert McGirr all that parcel or tract of land being composed of part of north half of lot numbertwenty-seven in the eighth Concession of Township of Osgoode, County of Carleton and province of Ontario, and containing by admeasurement fifty acres of land be the same more or less, being composed of forty-three acres from the west part of said lot less three acres from off the north west corner of said lot bequeathed to my son Henry McGirr, (and less road allowance of twenty feet in width along the south side of said lot for the purpose of road to centre of said lots.) And ten acres from off the east part of said lot to and for his own use forever. Also one span of horses, one set of double harnesses, one plough, three cows and six sheep of equal value from the horses, cows, sheep be then on the premises at my decease, to be chosen and delivered by my executors within six months after my decease if so required.

I give and bequeath to my son Henry McGirr three acres of land from of the north west corner of the north half of lot number twenty seven in the eighth Concession of the Township of Osgoode, County of Carleton and province of Ontario, commencing at the north-west corner of said lot and running twenty-four rods south and twenty rods east.

I give and bequeath to my son Alexander McGirr the remaining portion of the north half of lot number twenty seven in the eighth Concession of Osgoode Township, County of Carleton and province of Ontario being composed of that centr portion whereof forty-three acres is taken of the west side and ten acres taken of the east side. (containing forty seven acres more or less) and also road allowance of twenty feet in width from off the south side of the west part of said lot bequeathed to my son Robert McGirr. And I also give and demise unto my son Alexander McGirr the east half of lot number twenty-seven in the seventh Concession of Township of Osgoode, County of Carleton and Province of Ontario (excepting therefrom the dwelling house erected there and land whereon the dwelling house is situated together with garden lot on east side of said house extending to east Concession line.) Containing one hundred acres more or less. Also one span of horses, one plough, three cows, and six sheep, of equal value from the horses, cows, sheep etc. then on the premises at my decease, to be chosen by my Executors and delivered within six months after my decease.

(To be continued in the next edition) -