

Heritage on the Hill

The Richmond Hill Historical Society, P.O. Box 61527, 9350 Yonge St., Richmond Hill, ON L4C 0C9
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January / February 2011

Notice

**The Annual Meeting
of the
Richmond Hill Historical Society
will be held on
Monday, January 17, 2011
at 8:00 p.m.
in the William Wallace Hall
of the
Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church
10066 Yonge St**

**Presentation of Reports
Election of Directors
“Bring and Brag”**

Bring a Treasure from your collection to share with us

All Members Should Attend

The New Eden

Land ownership in Upper Canada

Cameron Knight

The Mary Lou Griffin Local History Collection is pleased to present a four part lecture series on the themes of land occupancy, settlement and ownership in Upper Canada. The series will explore such subjects as the concept of land ownership among the Mississauga First Nation, the great variety of land records available to researchers of pioneer ancestors and a case study of land speculation in the Home District.

Interested persons are asked to pre-register at the Central Library's Full Service Desk.

History of the Mississaugas, First Nation

When the first settlers began arriving in Upper Canada in the 1780's the Mississaugas had been resident on the north shore of Lake Ontario for nearly a century. By agreeing to the "Toronto Purchase" in 1787, the Mississaugas of the New Credit sold to the Crown the land stretching from Etobicoke Creek to Ashbridges Bay. Margaret Sault of the Mississauga of the New Credit Band will speak on the history of the Mississauga nation. As Director of Lands, Research and Membership for the Mississaugas of the New Credit, Ms Sault will share over thirty years of research. A short film will be shown.

Saturday, January 22, 2011
Richmond Hill Central Library, Meeting Room A/B
10:30 a.m.
Admission: \$5

Ontario Crown Land Records and the Land Granting Process

Crown land records are the records generated about the inhabitants of land while the government owned it. Many early settlers inhabited crown lands through renting, leasing, squatting, grants and purchases but many of these settlers never received the deed to the land from the crown. Fortunately, records of the initial settlement were still generated. Author, historian and genealogist Fawne Stratford-Devai will provide researchers with a sound understanding of the land granting process and the availability of crown land records.

Saturday, February 19, 2011
Richmond Hill Central Library, Meeting Room A/B
10:30-12:30 p.m.
Admission: \$5

Ontario Land Registry Office Records

Land Registry Office Records are the records generated once land in Ontario had been granted or sold to an individual by the Crown. All transactions after the initial grant/purchase are filed in local land registry offices throughout Ontario. Land Registry Office records are public documents that span more than two hundred years – from 1796 up to yesterday. Author, historian and genealogist Fawne Stratford-Devai will discuss how to access and use these records to learn about the individuals and families who owned a property and the history and settlement and development of Ontario.

Saturday March 19, 2011
Richmond Hill Central Library, Meeting Room A/B
10:30 to 12:30 p.m.
Admission: \$5

Who was William Cawthra?: Land Speculation in 19th Century York County

By the time of his death in 1880, eighty year old William Cawthra was the largest single landowner in York County and the wealthiest man in Toronto. Very little is known of Cawthra for he left no children and died intestate. His handsome Toronto residence situated at the corner of King and Sherbourne streets was considered the best designed building in Toronto. Local History Librarian Cameron Knight will trace Cawthra's career as a land speculator with particular reference to Markham and Vaughan Townships.

Saturday, April 16, 2010
Richmond Hill Central Library, Meeting Room A/B
10:30-11:30
Admission: \$5

The McConaghy Old Boys

THE MOB

The Lunch Meeting 2010

Jim Monkman

We're all growing old and are suffering the ravages of time! They took away Bob Edmund's driver's licence when he was diagnosed with the dread Parkinson disease. Consequently on Friday morning November 12th his wife, Bernice, drove him from their home in Thornhill to my home so that he could ride with me to the MOB luncheon at the McConaghy Seniors Centre.

It's a shorter walk to the entrance of McConaghy from the Presbyterian Church parking lot than it is from the McConaghy parking lot and as both of us have a problem walking I decided to use the Church's parking lot. I drove to the north end of the lot and backed into a parking space in the north west corner with the cemetery fence behind and the McConaghy fence beside us. We were less than ten feet from the grave of our old friend John Tracy.

The McConaghy Public School closed in June 1979, 31 years ago. Most of our members graduated from that school before 1950. As we entered the building we could tell by the noisy conversation which room to enter to join twenty old guys happily reminiscing about days shared together more than sixty years ago.

President, Bert, with the assistance of his wife, Elva, and daughter Karen were busy preparing the buffet table. Treasurer, Brian Stapley, was busy collecting the dinner fees. and recording the names of members as they arrived. I was very grateful that he was recording the members because once again I had forgotten to bring the "sign in" register.

I sat at a table beside Bill Schurman. Bill is one of our oldest members and, because he has always agreed to give thanks at our dinners, we have given him the honorary title of "Reverend"

Bert, managing to make himself heard above the noisy conversations, announced that the meal was almost ready but first we should have a moment of silence to remember the five Buddies we lost in 2010. In the quiet that followed we thought of Bruce Brillinger, Erle Cook, Doug Gilbert, Jimmy Stewart and Dean Wellman, who had passed away since we met here last November.

Then as is the custom Bert called on Reverend Bill Sherman to say Grace.

Bill slowly stood and announced that because we were meeting the day after Remembrance Day instead of composing the Grace as he spoke it, as was his custom, he had prepared a Blessing suitable for the occasion which he would like to read.

We all bowed our heads as Bill read:

"Gracious God, we give you thanks for all our Buddies here and those who have gone before us. We especially think, today of those of our Buddies who gave their lives, that we may have Peace, a peace that humans have not learned to keep. We give thanks for the sacrifices they gave. May They Rest In Peace.

Father we thank you for this food and ask you to Bless it to our use and we to Your Service.

Amen"

As Bill sat down a chorus of reverent "Amens" broke the silence that had momentarily filled the room.

Twenty-two old friends continued to chat enjoying being together again. Each silently wondering "will it be me or thee who won't be here next year?"



Upcoming Events

February is Black History Month

Our speaker will be Hilary Dawson, who is a genealogist and historical researcher. She is also a member of the Association of Professional Genealogists. Her subject will be Alfred Lafferty who was born in the slums of Toronto in 1839, and would become Chatham's first Black lawyer. The Lafferty parents had come to Toronto in the 1830s, escaping bondage and racism in the United States. They encouraged their children's education, and Alfred (their youngest son) attended Upper Canada College, followed by university. In 1866, the trustees of the Richmond Hill County Grammar School proudly announced that they had "secured the services of Mr. A.M. Lafferty, B.A., a Graduate and Silver Medalist (in both Classics and Mathematics) of the Toronto University" for the position of Headmaster. Alfred was not only an excellent teacher, but also an active member of the Richmond Hill community. His personal history provides a fascinating illustration of race and class in nineteenth-century Ontario.

The meeting will be on Monday, February 21, 2011 at 8:00 pm in the William Wallace Hall.

80 Years in Richmond Hill

Bill Schurman

I arrived in Richmond Hill in May of 1929 when I was 12 – about 80 years ago. We came to Richmond Hill from near Bethany, Ont, really in the boondocks. There was no hydro where we lived. So, needless to say, I was very surprised when I pushed a button on the wall and lights came on. We had been using oil lamps in the country and of course wood stove heating. Now we're in Richmond Hill on Benson Ave.

I was in the big city of Richmond Hill, population 1250 but to me it was far bigger than anything I had ever seen: four churches, two grocery stores, two meat stores, drug and hardware, etc, etc., greenhouses – three large companies that formed the largest rose growing centre in Canada. Was Wellman's shoe store – do you remember? I went to McConaghy School – that's how I became a member of The Mob.

Remember, in 1929 it was cheaper to move than pay rent. Money was very scarce. All these things lead to World War II. Several of our McConaghy School friends were lost. I lost a brother. I spent my war time in BC.

I want to zero in on Richmond and Elizabeth Streets. I met Florence across the street. Her Aunt Annie Tyndall lived there at #13. Florence and I were married in December 10, 1940 – that's soon going to be 69 years and we are still together. Miracles?

Here is a little storey: a few years ago Donna Smith called me about a chair to cane. She said, "Do you know where I live?" I said, "Yes, I used to live there." She said, "Oh! What apartment were you in?" I said, "Number two." "Oh," she said, "I don't think there was ever a number two." I said, "There was then." We lived in one half; Sam and Lil Atkinson lived in the other half. We had a phone and Sam came often to use it.

In a period of 80 years so much has happened.

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Richmond Hill Fox Ranch

Madeline Johnson

In 1933 when I was 10 years old we moved to Carrville Rd. My father, D.C. Clarke, was hired to manage E.T. Stephen's fox ranch, located on Roselawn Farms.

The farms started at Yonge St. (now Hillcrest Mall) went to Carrville Rd. on the south, on the north to Weldrick Rd. (formerly Mill Rd.), and halfway to Bathurst St. on the west.

The fox ranch was in the middle with only farm lanes leading to it. Each fox, or pair, had a kennel inside a square of fenced-in yard. When the ranch was at its peak of approximately 1,000 foxes it covered a number of acres of land.



E.T. Stephen's Fox Ranch 1932 to approx. 1939
looking toward Weldrick Rd.



E.T. Stephen's Fox Ranch 1932 to approx. 1939
looking toward Carrville Rd..

There was a shed at one end for feed and supplies and a two storey tower at the other end so the keeper could have a good look over the pens and spot any trouble. Closed in pens were all along the north side.

Gradually the fashion of wearing a fox fur or coat was no longer popular and by 1940 the fox ranch was gone.



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Traditions for a Happy New Year

The name of the month of January comes from the Roman god, Janus. He was the guardian of doorways and beginnings. He had two faces and was able to look backwards and forwards. The first of January is traditionally a time for reflecting on the past and planning for the future. There has always been a strong belief that what happens on the first day of January will affect the rest of the year. Consequently many traditions developed about what one must do on this day to ensure good luck for the rest of the year.

Scotland is famous for celebrating Hogmanay at New Year. It was a bigger celebration than Christmas until as late as the 1950s. An important part of Hogmanay was "first-footing." The first person to set foot across the threshold after midnight on New Year's Eve was believed to affect the fortunes of the household. It was considered very auspicious to have a tall, dark and handsome man as the first footer. He would carry a piece of coal, some salt, a black bun and a bottle of whiskey to bring good luck.

New Year is also a time for great parties and celebrations. In modern times masquerade parties have become popular. I wonder if they descend from the old European Mummers. They were troupes of disguised actors who would travel about acting out traditional allegorical plays. This tradition evolved and was carried from Ireland to Newfoundland in the 19th century.

Mumming, or Jannying as it is known in Newfoundland, is still very popular there. The mummers dress up to hide their identities and roam around the community knocking on a doors and ask. "Any mummers 'lowed in?" If they are invited in, they entertain the householders with music, song and antics. The householders try to guess the mummers' identities. If they do, the mummer has to remove his mask but still joins in the fun.

The tradition of wassailing is remembered in the Christmas carol "Here we come a-wassailing among the leaves so green." Technically, this is not a carol or a Christmas song. The word "wassail" comes from the Anglo-Saxon phrase 'waes hael', which means 'good health.' In northern European countries groups of carollers would carry a bowl of wassail, or mulled hard cider, from house to house. They would sing songs, such as the one mentioned above, and invite the people to drink some wassail. The wassailers would ask for food or money. As the Wassail Song says, "We are not daily beggars". But they still "want some of your small change."

A very strange version of wassailing occurred in South Wales. A group of revellers would travel around the village with the Mari Lwyd ('marry loo-eed'), or Grey Mare. This was a horse's skull mounted on a long pole. The skull would be decorated with ribbons and bells and had a sheet

hanging from it to hide the man carrying it. It is thought that this tradition comes from an ancient Celtic ritual to honour Rhiannon, the goddess of horses. The Mari Lwyd and her party would knock at the door of a house or pub and sing a ritual song inviting the people within to take part in a poetic contest. Both sides would trade challenges and insults, all sung in verse. The contest would end when one side ran out of witty responses. If the Mari Lwyd party won, they would then enter, sing some more songs and be served food and drink.

A very Canadian tradition is the New Year's Levee. The Levee originated in the court of Louis XIV of France, who would receive subjects shortly after arising (lever) in the morning. The custom spread to other countries and became a formal reception given in the morning by the monarch or his representative. In Canada the Levee became associated with New Year's Day. Charles Huault de Montmagny, Governor of New France, held the first Levee on January 1st, 1646 in the Château St. Louis. New Years Levee receptions are still held throughout Canada. It seems that everybody, from the provincial Lieutenant Governors General, to our own Reza Moridi, had a Levee this January first.

Whatever your background, I hope you performed your own personal New Years traditions and that you will all have a very happy, healthy and prosperous New Year.



The Richmond Hill Historical Society Membership Application/Renewal

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