

THE HERALD

THE HEAD-OF-THE-LAKE HISTORICAL SOCIETY - HAMILTON

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History of the Hamilton Fire Department, 1833 - 1972

Part 1: 1833-1879

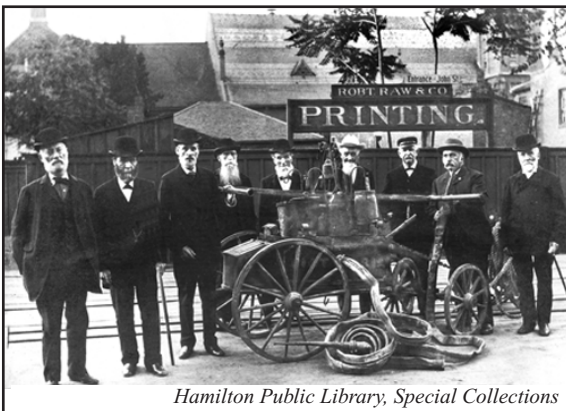
For early Canadian centers such as Hamilton, consisting largely of frame structures with open fireplaces and without running water, fire posed an ever-present hazard. In the autumn of 1832 fire broke out in a tavern in downtown Hamilton. The flames spread rapidly, due to a strong breeze, enveloping five other businesses including the post office, the Western Mercury newspaper office and the offices of the Desjardins Canal Company. Three hours later, a whole city block was gone.

Thus, it is not surprising that several of the first by-laws passed following Hamilton's incorporation as a police village in 1833 dealt with preventing and fighting fires. Each homeowner was required to have a bucket and a ladder. An inspector was appointed to ensure that all chimneys in the town were clear. Soon after, the town fathers decided that the old "bucket brigade" approach no longer met the needs of a community the size of Hamilton and in 1835 the town's first fire engine, basically a pump on wheels, was purchased.

On January 13, 1836, the town's first engine company was authorized. Later that year, John Stinson deeded the town a plot of land 30 ft. wide by 40 ft. deep on the north side of King William Street between John and Hughson Streets for a fire engine house on the condition that if the land was ever put to another use, its ownership would revert back to Stinson or his heirs. The Hamilton Fire Department is still headquartered at this site – 55 King William Street.

Hamilton's Act of Incorporation as a city in 1846 clearly reflected the preoccupation with fire. Under the Act, City Council was empowered to prepare by-laws "to prevent or regulate the carrying on of manufactories or trades

dangerous in causing or promoting fire." It could establish regulations concerning the construction of buildings or chimneys, prevent the construction of wooden buildings in thickly populated areas of the city, and enforce the proper cleaning of chimneys. The owners of buildings could be forced to keep scuttles, ladders, and fire buckets on hand, and the population-at-large could be compelled to assist at fires if their aid was required. Finally, City Council was allowed to purchase fire engines and to operate and regulate hook and ladder and



Hamilton Public Library, Special Collections

property-saving companies.

By-laws soon were passed concerning the prevention and extinguishing of fires and prohibiting the construction of wooden buildings in central areas of the city. In early February 1847 the five member Fire Committee of City Council reported that it was "expedient and necessary that a fire department should be established." Hamilton already possessed two fire engines and an engine house; the new two company department would be composed of volunteers. The men would be paid for attending each fire, and the money put into a benevolent fund with a premium paid to the first engine company to arrive at the fire. Gradually, new companies were added so that by 1857 there were eight companies with a combined membership of 518 officers and men. The composition of these companies, staffed largely by workingmen, reflected the particular interests of their members. For example, Company No. 2 began as a temperance unit while Company No. 6 was manned by Orangemen. Total expenditures in 1857 equalled \$1,908.

Members of the Fire Brigade voted among themselves to choose the Chief Engineer, and the names of three candidates then were submitted in order of preference to Council which made the final decision. In the view of the Brigade, Council's approval was only to be a rubber stamp, and the candidate with the greatest number of votes was to be selected. But Council had other ideas, and this often led to tension with the Brigade. In early 1848 for example, the Fire Committee let it be known that it was less than pleased with the Department's choice of Samuel Kerr as Chief Engineer; in its opinion, Kerr had

his job and the fire apparatus. The Fire Companies, for their part, countered by castigating the city for failing to provide adequate supplies and arguing that the Department was in good shape only because of the diligence and energy of the men themselves. When Chief Kerr was dismissed in August, allegedly for incurring debts without the approval of Council, the Fire Companies resigned en masse.

Jurisdictional quarrels between the volunteer Department and City Council, which owned the fire fighting apparatus, occurred frequently as Council tried to assert its authority and the volunteers their independence. In the mid 1850's Council and the Chief quarrelled, with Council maintaining the Chief had overextended his authority by ordering engine tanks to be filled with water without first obtaining the consent of the Fire and Water Committee.

In 1859, when Council refused to ratify the Brigade's choice for Chief Engineer, the Department disbanded. Council's candidate, Thomas Gray, assumed control of the fire fighting equipment. Gray's attempts to reorganize a new Department were largely unsuccessful. The resulting bitterness affected the Companies and was voiced in the Brigade minutes which record that when Gray attended a meeting called in February 1860 to pick a new Chief, "at once he proceeded to maintain the name of 'Dodger' by resorting to the low trickery which has characterized him on former occasions."

In 1863, Council refused to select a Chief from among the names submitted to it by the Department. In the words of one candidate, William Inkson, who had agreed to run only with the understanding that if chosen he would be remunerated for his services, "the Council

seemed to care little about this matter.” In disgust, the Brigade refused to participate in a procession celebrating the marriage of the Prince of Wales “on account of the very untoward conduct of City Council, inasmuch as they have neglected to recognize the voice of this body.”

As clashes between City Council and the Department became increasingly frequent, Council tried to assert its authority over the Companies. After 1868, the Chief Engineer was paid a stipend of \$100 per year. Under By-law 274, passed in April 1868, the Fire Committee approved all appointments to the Brigade and could dismiss members. Moreover, each quarter

the Brigade Secretary was to provide the City Clerk with a list of members including their occupation, place of residence, and the date they joined the Department, and an inventory of equipment; if this was not done the Companies would be denied their annual grant from the city. By the 1870's, Council believed there was an advantage in having a trained, paid, standing force under a professional Chief Engineer to replace the fractious volunteer Brigade. In 1879, in spite of the objections of many volunteers, a permanent paid force of nine members, with support from 24 call men, was created.

Part 2 of this fascinating story will follow in the Spring issue of *The Herald*.

Vanished Hamilton - Hamilton Orphan's Asylum & Aged Women's Home

Robert Hamilton

Located at 195 Wellington Street South at Hannah (now Charlton), Hamilton, Ontario.

The Ladies' Benevolent Society was established in May 1846 to minister to the needs of “cases of distress and destitution arising from sickness, poverty or similar courses.” The Society solicited free medical attention and medicines, money, clothing, and food from the citizens of Hamilton. By 1848, it had established its first unit: an orphan asylum and day school for the children of the poor. The ravages of cholera meant that there were many children to be aided: 100 pupils attended the day school. By 1851, in spite of renting an additional building, it was clear that facilities were not adequate to meet the needs of the poor. A campaign, led by former mayor, John Fisher, was begun to raise monies for the construction of an orphan asylum. In 1852, the Ladies' Benevolent Society was incorporated as the Hamilton Orphan Asylum and Ladies' Benevolent Society.

As of June 1852, the Building Fund

stood at just over £986. On June 15, 1852 architect William Thomas (1799-1860), a Toronto architect who operated an adjunct Hamilton office between 1852 and 1858, presented a plan for the orphan asylum. Thomas was a prolific architect, between 1852 and 1857 completing 14 commissions in Hamilton, including St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church (now St. Paul's) between 1854 and 1857.

Work proceeded quickly and by September 27, 1852, Thomas was able to inform the building committee that the stone would be ready by September 29th. Thomas met the target and the cornerstone was laid that day. The building finally was ready for occupancy in June 1853 at a cost of £1602. However, the school did not last long. The advent of free public education and the opening of the Central School in 1854 meant that the school for destitute children was closed in 1854, leaving the building to operate solely as an orphanage.



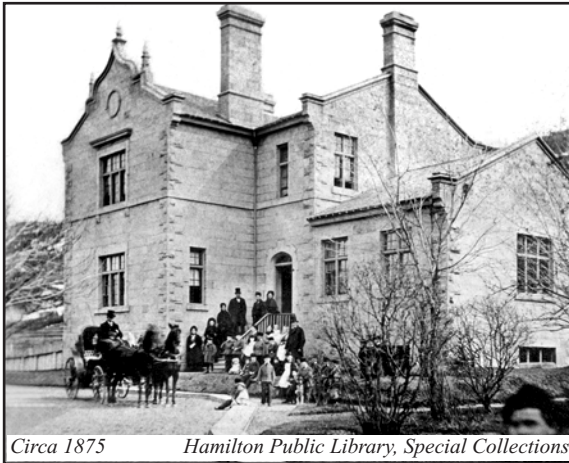
Vanished Hamilton - Hamilton Orphan's Asylum ...cont'd.

In 1875 a bequest of \$4000 was received for the construction of an aged women's home. In 1876, a further bequest to the Orphan Asylum of \$17,000 put it on a firm financial footing, and plans were approved in June 1876 for a wing to house 20 aged women, with tenders issued amounting to \$4,311. Work commenced on July 18, 1878 according to plans submitted by architect Charles W. Mulligan, who operated in Hamilton between 1874 and 1892 and was responsible for the second Wentworth County Court House (erected between 1877 and 1879).

In the 1890's a third alteration was made, this time to the roof, allowing a third floor with at

least one dormer window, Gothic in style, to be added to the front of the building.

In 1914 the government decreed that children could not be cared for in the same institution as the aged and the building became solely devoted to the care of aged women. The fourth alteration was the addition of a brick wing at the rear of the structure in 1915. The Aged Women's Home continued to operate until just prior to its demolition in May 1959, following the completion of a new facility on Hamilton's upper escarpment (Idlewyld Manor).



60 Years Young!

2004 was a special year in the history of the Head-of-the-Lake Historical Society – one in which we celebrated our 60th anniversary. In January 1944 Lt. Col. C.R. McCullough (1865-1947) convened a meeting of a history-minded residents of Hamilton – one of whom was the Rev. T. Melville Bailey, our honorary president – to discuss the establishment of a new historical society in the city. On March 22nd, 20 interested citizens met with the organizing group to adopt a constitution, confirm the executive, and select a name – the Head-of-the-Lake Historical Society. The first general meeting of the new society was held in the old Art Gallery on Main Street West near

James on March 31, 1944.

In the intervening 60 years the Society has held over 400 meetings, published books on local history, sponsored historical plaques, and undertaken numerous other heritage-related projects, all in an effort to fulfill its motto to “Explore, Preserve and Relate” the history of our community. 2004's special anniversary project was the erection of a monument in Hamilton Cemetery in memory of members of the MacNab Family.

So, as the new year begins, let's once again say **“Happy Birthday Head-of-the-Lake, and Here's to 60 More”**. Hip-Hip-Hurray!

The Masonic Order in Ontario is governed by the “Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario”.

Up until 1855, Masonic Lodges in the province were under the jurisdiction of an appointed Grand Master from the Grand Lodge of England. Lodges were also organized under the Grand Lodges of Scotland and Ireland. In 1842 while on a trip to Edinburgh, Sir Allan MacNab was issued a warrant from the Grand Lodge of Scotland making him the first Canadian-born Grand Master. Two years later while in England, he received a similar warrant from the Grand Lodge of England. This set the stage for the formation of a separate Grand Lodge.

A meeting held in Hamilton in 1852, presided over by MacNab, petitioned the Grand Lodge of England to permit the establishment of a separate Grand Lodge for Upper Canada. The petition was granted in 1855. On October 10th, a meeting was held at the lodge hall on the north-east corner of Main and John Streets in Hamilton (the building still stands today) to form the provincial Grand Lodge. In attendance were representatives from 41 lodges with a total membership of 115,000

individuals. At that meeting, Brother William Mercer Wilson was elected the first Grand Master.

A number of prominent Hamilton citizens have served as Grand Master of the Order: Hugh Murray, 1884-85; Sir John Morison Gibson, 1892-93; Augustus Freed, 1907-09; William Wardrope, 1917-19; Justice Russell Treleaven, 1961-63; Eric Nancekville, 1975-77; and Norman E. Byrne, 1991-92.

Masons from the surrounding area, such as James Seymour, also played a considerable role in the founding of the Grand Lodge and Royal Arch Masonry. Although he was from St. Catharines, Seymour was initiated in Barton Lodge. He served as Grand Master in 1871-72 and assisted in the establishment of Seymour Lodge in Ancaster in 1872.

As well, for 96 years of the Grand Lodge’s 150 years of existence, Hamilton masons have filled the post of Grand Secretary: Thomas Harris, 1855-74; JohnMason, 1875-92; William Logan, 1919-36; and Ewart Dixon, 1937-70.

The present Grand Master is Donald H. Mumby from the Ottawa area.

16th Annual Heritage Dinner: 2005

Time is running out to get your tickets to our 16th Annual Heritage Dinner on Friday, February 18, 2005.

This year’s dinner will be held at the Scottish Rite Club of Hamilton, 4 Queen Street South at King Street, Hamilton, with cocktails at 6 p.m. and dinner at 7 p.m. Presented in partnership with Masonic Temple No. 324 (Hamilton), the evening will feature a talk by D.H. Mumby, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge in Ontario, who will speak about 150 years of Freemasonry in Hamilton and Ontario.

Tickets are \$35 per person and can be ordered

from David Beland – (905)-549-4407 or by e-mail at dbeland@istar.ca

Each year we remind Society members **not to delay** in buying their tickets. This year’s warning is more applicable than ever as we have many Masons eager to attend. A block of tickets has been reserved for Society members but these will go on general sale on February 1st so again ... don’t procrastinate if you want to attend what is always Hamilton’s heritage social event of the year!



We are now very nearly into our winter season. Since our last summer report we have been quite busy. On Labour Day weekend we took part in the annual Mustard Festival, which once again was very successful. We sold a number of maps and books plus one video and 16 calendars for a total of \$516.

On September 19th we took our table out to Westfield Heritage Village for Anne of Green Gables Day. This was more of an information table where we fulfilled our mandate to “relate” local history to interested passersby. On November 12th we went out to the Flamborough Heritage Bookfair and met up with other historical and heritage groups from the area.

At our November general meeting, our member Susan Evans Shaw brought in a copy of her new book, *Heritage Treasures: The Historic Homes of Ancaster, Burlington, Dundas, East Flamborough, Hamilton, Stoney Creek and Waterdown*, to let us see it; members were quite impressed!

In August, Shirley Knight celebrated her 80th birthday, and her family arranged a celebration at Olivet United Church. Shirley is a dedicated worker, always ready to help out on the telephone committee or at our book table. I believe she works to give breakfasts to hungry children at her church as well. So, congratulations Shirley, and many happy returns!

It has been all good news so far, but we have also had a lot of sad news. We have lost three

more members. The first was Campbell Leckie, who joined at one of our Mustard Festivals. He was a very pleasant man. Then, on October 8th, long-time member Lew Heaton passed on quietly. He had been a chartered accountant and office manager with Greening Donald until his retirement in 1979. Lew was an active volunteer for and worked with Amity Goodwill as their accountant for 20 years following his retirement. One year, he was chosen Amity’s volunteer of the year.

As well, when our telephone committee member Margot Kirkpatrick called to remind Marjorie Tice about the November meeting, she received the awful news that Marjorie had passed away and had already been laid to rest. This was quite a shock to us all because we had not heard that Marjorie was ailing. We will be in touch with her family. Her son John is a member of the Society. Some years ago Marjorie’s daughter, Peggy Savage, wrote a book about St. Joseph’s Hospital entitled *To Serve With Honour* and spoke about it at one of our meetings.

We send our condolences to the families and friends of Campbell, Lew and Marjorie. We also send our good wishes to our members who have difficulty getting to the meetings due to their health and hope that they will feel better soon.

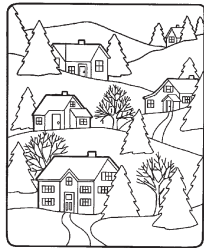
By the way, we need volunteers to cover our after-meeting coffee time in March, April and May 2005. If you can assist, please call me at (905) 527-1527. I would also like to ask you to please remember to bring a cup with you to the meetings to help reduce the amount of garbage produced so we can help save the environment in our own small way.



Happy New Year to everyone!

Heritage News

Two local heritage groups recently were awarded grants from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The Korea Veterans Association Canada, Inc., Hamilton Region 26, received a grant of \$16,000 over one year to publish a pictorial history book about Korean War veterans and to educate the public about their place in history. The Federated Women's Institute of Canada was given a grant of \$19,100 over one year to renovate and improve the Adelaide Hunter Hoodless Homestead and to expand its heritage programming. Congratulations. The City of Hamilton's *List of Designated Properties and Heritage Conservation Easements under the Ontario Heritage Act*, *The Inventory of Buildings of Architectural and/or Historical Interest* and the Hamilton component of the Canadian Inventory of Historic Buildings are now available for downloading via the web site of the City's



Planning and Development Department: <http://www.hamilton.ca/Planning-and-Development/long-range/heritage-urban/cultural-heritage.asp>

The Heritage Canada Foundation has announced that the national theme for Heritage Day 2005 will be "Spiritual and Sacred Places". On October 16, 2004, the Ontario Heritage Foundation and the Humber Heritage Committee unveiled a provincial plaque to mark the 50th anniversary of Hurricane Hazel, the catastrophic 1954 storm which killed 81 people, left thousands homeless and caused over \$180 million in property damage. "Hazel's" legacy was the development of a province-wide weather and flood forecasting and warning system and new watershed conservation measures. Toronto's Santa Claus Parade is 100 years old. This milestone was marked on November 19, 2004 when the Ontario Heritage Foundation unveiled a provincial plaque to the parade at Nathan Philips Square in Toronto.

Future Society Meetings

◆ Friday, February 18, 2005

16th Annual Heritage Dinner

◆ Friday March 11, 2005

Christine Lei talks about the history of the Ontario Normal School in Hamilton.

Canadian Football Hall of Fame, 7:30 p.m.

◆ Friday , April 8, 2005

Dr. Jonathan Vance will speak on the Great War

and its impact on the Hamilton area.

Canadian Football Hall of Fame, 7:30 p.m.

◆ Friday May 13, 2005

John Aikman will take us on a tour of the Educational Archives and Heritage Centre of Hamilton-Wentworth, housed at Vincent Massey School, 155 Macassa Avenue, in Hamilton. *Meet at the Archives at 7:30 p.m.*

Other Societies and Activities

The theme of Greater Hamilton's Heritage Day celebrations is *Hamilton's Heritage Comes Home*. Come to Hamilton City Hall on Saturday, February 19th between 10:00 and 3:00 p.m. for a heritage marketplace and vol-

unteer awards. As an added bonus, Whitehern Historical House and Garden is offering free admission as part of the day's activities. Free parking at City Hall.

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Other Societies and Activities

❖ The **Dundas Valley Historical Society** meets at the Dundas Museum, 139 Park Street West, at 7:30 p.m. There is a \$2 admission fee.

• **Wednesday, January 19th**: Tracey Rogers and Mike Brand present *Who Killed Jimmy Thompson?*

• **February 2005**: *Second Annual Dundas Heritage Dinner*. Details to be announced.

• **Wednesday, March 16th**: Jane Mulkewich on *Sophia, Slavery and Deer-Hunting in Dundas*

❖ The **Grimsby Historical Society**

meets in the St. Andrew's Parish Hall, 154 Main Street West, Grimsby at 8:00 p.m.

• **Wednesday, January 19th**: Ann & Murray Bering, of White Meadows Farms present *The Maple Syrup Story*

• **Wednesday, February 16th**: Catherine Slaney, educator and author, will speak on *Family Secrets – Crossing the Colour Line*

• **Wednesday March 16th**: Margaret Houghton of the Hamilton Public Library's Special Collections Department will introduce listeners to *Great Men of Hamilton's History*

❖ The **Stoney Creek Historical Society** meets at Stoney Creek City Hall, 777 Highway No. 8, Council Chambers, at 7:30 p.m.

• **Wednesday, February 2nd**: Alex Alexanian speaks on *The History of Rugs*

❖ The **Waterdown-East Flamborough Heritage Society** meets in the Fellowship Hall at St. James United Church, Parkside Drive, Waterdown at 8:00 p.m.

• **Friday, January 28th**: *Celebrating Rotary – 50 Years in Waterdown*, presented by Peter Vance and Nan Bruce, looks at the history of one of the community's best known service clubs.

• **Friday, February 25th**: The present owners of Kitching, Steepe and Ludwig Funeral Home, located at 140 Mill Street in Waterdown and in business for over 75 years, will discuss *Funeral Practices in Flamborough over the Years*

• **Friday April 1st**: Jerry Disher and Ted Smith, authors of the book *By Design: The Role of the Engineer in the History of the Hamilton Burlington Area*, will examine the impact that technology and engineering has had on the Flamborough, Burlington and Hamilton area over the past 220 years.

❖ The **Whitehern Historic House and Garden**, 41 Jackson Street West, Hamilton **March 15th to 18th**: During March Break, Whitehern will present *Old Fashioned Cartoons and Kid's Comedies*, afternoons of vintage comedy for kids, parents and grandparents. For more information call (905) 546-2018.

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