

NEWS and views

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Simcoe County Historical Association

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Visit our Website

www.simcoecountyhistory.ca

SCHA

Preserving the Past,
in the Present,
for the Future.

Fabulous Fall SCHA Events

The lineup of speakers for this fall promises to bring variety for the SCHA membership to enjoy.

Whether you have visited the restored *SS Keewatin* in Port McNicoll or not you will not want to miss "Captain" Eric Conroy who will address the Barrie Historical Association and the Simcoe County Historical Association on Tuesday September 16 at 7:30 pm in the Rotunda of Barrie City Hall. This Edwardian steamship carried passengers in style and a variety of freight between the Lake head and its home port of Port McNicoll from 1907 to 1966. Conroy served as a teenage waiter for the last few years of the ship's run and has many fond memories as well as a wealth of information regarding its history and its ongoing restoration.

A Brief History of *SS Keewatin*

Built by Fairfield Shipbuilding and Engineering Company in Scotland as Hull No. 453, the *Keewatin* was launched on July 6, 1907 and entered service in the following year. She ran

continuously for almost 60 seasons, being retired in 1966. Soon after, she was acquired by RJ Peterson of Douglas Michigan for historic preservation and was later listed on the National Register of Historic Places in the United States. Her sister ship, the *Assiniboia*, was also set to be preserved as an attraction, but burned in Camden, New Jersey in 1971 and was scrapped.

In the last twenty years of her working life, like many passenger ships of that era on the Great Lakes, the *Keewatin* and sister ship *SS Assiniboia* operated under stringent regulations imposed for wooden cabin steamships following the *Noronic* disaster in 1949. That was a similar ship that caught fire and burned while on the docks in Toronto, Ontario with large loss of life. Doomed by their wooden cabins and superstructure, these overnight cruisers lasted through the decline of the passenger trade on the lakes in the post-war years.

Continued on page 3...

SCHA 2014 Schedule

September 16 – Eric Conroy – The *SS Keewatin* at the Rotunda of **Barrie City Hall, 70 Collier St. at 7:30 p.m.**

October 21 – Andrew Hunter Prize Winner, John Merritt – *The Oro Black Settlement: Black Realities, White Interpretations, 1819-1949* at the **Simcoe County Museum, Highway 26, Midhurst, at 7:30 p.m.**

November 18 – Lori Oschefski and Sandra Joyce – *British Home Children in Canada: Breaking the Silence* at the **Barrie Legion, 410 St. Vincent St. at 7:30 p.m.**

President's Ponderings: Fall 2014

by Mark Fisher

As summer winds down, I trust that everyone has had a relaxing and enjoyable time in spite of all the rain. It has certainly been beneficial for the vegetation and water levels. This was particularly true for my cottage on West bay of Lake Nipissing where I passed many days. Located near the Dokis First Nations Reserve, where the French River flows out of Lake Nipissing, I managed to pick up a recently published copy of a history of the reserve. It is a fascinating story, in particular the heroic efforts of Michael D'Aigle who led this tiny band in opposition to the combined pressure and threats from the big American and Canadian lumber interests backed by the full weight of the provincial and federal governments to sell off the 39,000 acres of prime old-growth white pine. They finally gave in by 1918. Our own Jim Angus from Orillia gave a detailed account of this struggle in his

book *A Deo Victoria, a history of the Georgian Bay Lumber Company*, located at Waubaushene where Jim grew up.

Our programme for this year is taking shape, opening with Eric Conroy on the SS Keewatin, September 16 as detailed in this issue. In October we will have John Merritt, the winner of the Andrew Hunter prize, speak to us about his research on the Oro Black settlement and the perceptions of it that have existed over the years. November 18 we will join with the Legion once again for a presentation by Sandra Joyce and Lori Oschefski about the British Home Children. At a recent meeting with the two women, several members of the Executive were held enthralled for two hours by what they have to relate.

The Gowan portrait restoration has now been completed and Gary Owen has done a magnificent job. We are

still raising funds for an unexpected cost over-run but hope to have a grand unveiling sometime in the fall. There will be notice of this in the Barrie newspapers. And finally, take note of the programme on page 4 that will be put on by the Legion on Saturday, September 27, 1-4 p.m., in commemoration of the 85th anniversary of the Legion and the 100th anniversary of the start of World War I. Admission is free. In the evening there will be a banquet. Cost \$15. So we are off to a great start for the year. Looking forward to seeing you all.

Announcement: *The SCHA welcomes anyone interested in joining the Executive Officers in the position of Recording Secretary. After the Annual General Meeting, this position remains unfilled.*

Please contact any of the executive members listed below for details.

Festival at the Fort

Come to Fort Willow on Saturday, September 13 to witness life during the early 19th century with activities and demonstrations for all ages!

- military, First Nations and voyageur encampments
- cannon and musket firing demonstrations
- First Nations presentations and drumming

•re-enactors and authentic demonstrations of medicine, sewing, cooking, weaving, blacksmithing and more

- entertainment including music, storytelling and games
- children's hands-on activities including musket drills, candle making and beading

NO parking is available at Fort Willow.

The event runs from 10a.m.-4p.m. and admission is free.

Park on George Johnston Road near Seadon Road and hike the last mile to the Fort, or take advantage of the FREE parking and shuttle between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. from Grenfel Community Hall, 1989 Sunnidale Road.

See <http://nvca.on.ca> for more details.

Simcoe County Historical Association Executive

Mark Fisher, President	728-3825 mwfisher2@hotmail.com
Earl Elliott, Vice President	734-9808 earl.elliott@rogers.com
Gord Harris, Treasurer	739-7649 gordon.harris67@gmail.com
Ardis Harris, Corresponding Secretary	739-7649 ardis.harris@gmail.com

For Membership Information, contact

Earl Elliott, Membership Chair	734-9808 earl.elliott@rogers.com
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You are invited to submit photos and articles regarding your historical happenings in Simcoe County. Photos will be returned. Mail to SCHA, Box 144, Barrie, ON L4M 4S9.

Deadline for the next issue is November 25, 2014

SCHA Fall Program Overview continued

As passengers opted for more reliable and faster modes of travel, the *Keewatin* and her sister ship were withdrawn from the passenger trade in 1965, *Assiniboia* continuing in freight-only service until September 1967. Along with the South American and the Milwaukee Clipper, the *Keewatin* was among the last of the turn-of-the-century style overnight passenger ships of the Great Lakes. The *Keewatin* was eventually moved to Douglas, Michigan, in 1967, where she was a museum ship across the river from the summer retreat Saugatuck, Michigan. In June of 2012, she was sold to Canadian developer Skyline Investments and sailed back to the Port that had been her home since 1912, Port McNicoll, Ontario. The ship is run by a volunteer organization and is open to the public as an Historic Destination.

The *Keewatin* had also become a floating set for a number of maritime-related documentaries and television docudramas, including subjects involving the torpedoed ocean liner *Lusitania* (built by the way at the same time as *Keewatin* in Govan, Scotland), the burned-out Bahamas cruise ship *Yarmouth Castle*, Canadian Pacific's *Empress of Ireland*, as well as the *Titanic*. *Keewatin's* latest starring role was with *Murdoch Mysteries*, a Canadian made, world distributed TV show about an Edwardian Police Detective. The entire episode was filmed on *Keewatin* who played herself.

On October 21, John Merritt will present his Andrew Hunter Award winning essay, *The Oro Black Settlement: Black Realities, White Interpretations, 1819-1949*. John describes what little is known about the nature of the 19th-century Black settlement in Oro Township and

briefly attempts to place it in the contexts both of Upper Canadian land settlement after the War of 1812 and in Black history in both Upper Canada and the United States. He then contrasts what are probably the more accurate, contemporary interpretations of what the settlement was (as presented in books like the Township of Oro's *Story of Oro*, W. A. Fisher's *Legend of the Drinking Gourd*, and especially Gary French's *Men of Colour*) with the probably more mythologized, less accurate interpretations of the settlement as being related to the Underground Railroad and fugitive American slaves. John also shows that these more mythologized interpretations of the settlement persist into the present day, or at least are just beginning to become less popular than the more accurate interpretations of authors like Fisher and French and institutions like Oro Township, the Simcoe County Archives, and the governments of Ontario and Canada.

As primary examples of this more mythical interpretation of the settlement, he focuses on local historians like W. R. Best and especially former premier E. C. Drury in the speeches and poems about the settlement which they produced in honour of the restoration and centennial celebrations of the Oro African Methodist Episcopal Church building in 1949. In order to do so, he utilized documents from the Oro African Church file at the Simcoe County Archives, including draft speeches and correspondence from both Best and Drury leading up to the centennial. Also at the archives, John accessed numerous articles from *The Barrie Examiner* and other local newspapers, both from the weeks around the centennial celebrations

and in decades following, which consistently reiterate the more mythical interpretation of the settlement.

John completed most of his undergrad degree in history at the University of Guelph between 2005 and 2009. He completed his Honours BA in History last year at Laurentian University's Georgian College campus in Barrie. This essay was the final major assignment for Dr. Brad Rudachyk's mandatory fourth-year Topics in Canadian History seminar. John has just begun graduate studies in North American History at Laurentian University this year. He is doing coursework at the main campus in Sudbury but will be completing independent research and tutorial position at the Barrie campus under Dr. Todd Webb. For his independent research John will be continuing his work on the history of the Oro Black Settlement.

On November 18, join us at the Barrie Legion for tales of The British Home Children. From the late 19th century to 1949, 118,000-120,000 children of all ages were brought to Canada in a migrant scheme to be used as indentured farm workers and domestics. Upon arrival in Canada, and after ensuring their fitness, the children were sent to distributing homes and then to farms under contract until the age of 18. The children often found an ambivalent welcome. Some were fortunate enough to be placed with families who cared well for them; however, the monitoring of children's placements was often neglected, and many children found themselves essentially abandoned to new lives which were worse than the old.

Continued on page 5...

**Barrie Legion Br. 147
410 St. Vincent St. (off Ferris Lane)
presents
A Commemoration,
100th Anniversary of World War I**

Indoor Militaria Displays starts at 12 noon

Outdoor Wreath Ceremony at 1pm

Speakers' Session (indoors) at 2pm:

Dan Black, Author & Editor Cdn. Legion Magazine

Major John Fisher, Grey & Simcoe Foresters

**Jennifer Brunelle, Historical Interpreter Simcoe Cty.
Museum**

Evening Banquet at 7pm to mark

Legion Br. 147 85th Anniversary

RSVP – 705-728-1412 (Tickets for Dinner \$15)

Photo courtesy Simcoe Cty. Ar

**Saturday Sept. 27, 2014 12 Noon
Admission Free**

SCHA Fall Program Overview continued

When the First World War broke out, almost 100 percent of the Home Boys who were eligible to enlist did and after extensive research, the British Home Child Advocacy and Research Association have counted up to 10,000 Home Boys who enlisted and 1,043 who have been identified so far as having lost their lives in or as a result of the war.

During a special commemorative service held on July 28th, Don Cherry, whose maternal grandfather was a Home Boy and served in the Canadian army in the First World War, joined the BHCARA as they unveiled a Roll of Honour plaque, listing the names of the British Home Children who perished as a result of the First World War at Black Creek Pioneer Village in Toronto.

At our meeting, Lori Oschefski, CEO of The British Home Children Advocacy and Research Association, will reveal the key reasons why there was such a high enlistment rate. Co-speaker Sandra Joyce will talk about how, as a direct result of the First World War, the number of children included in this child migration scheme dramatically increased. Her two books, *The Street Arab* and the newly released *Belonging*, address the issue of the First World War and Second World War and how the British Home Children, of whom her father was one, struggled with identity even as part of the Canadian army. Her book *Belonging* will be released at Black Creek Pioneer Village in Toronto on British Home Child Day in Ontario on September 28th.

The Andrew Hunter Award 2015

The Andrew Hunter Award is offered annually for historical research on Simcoe County, Ontario, written by an undergraduate student for a course in any university or college. In this seventh year of competition, we look forward to receiving many worthy entries for each of the two awards being offered.

Conditions: The entry shall be an essay between 3,000 and 5,000 words in length or a fourth year undergraduate thesis paper (no length restriction) on some aspect of the history of Simcoe County, Ontario, written in English or in French. The author must have been a part-time or full-time undergraduate student in a degree program at an accredited university or college at the time of writing. The essay must have been written to meet the requirement of an undergraduate credit course during the 2014-2015 academic year. The thesis paper must have been submitted for grading in the 2014-2015 academic year. Entries become the property of the



Simcoe County Historical Association and may be published as part of an essay collection.

Submissions: Essay entries shall be postmarked by April 20, 2015, and undergraduate theses shall be postmarked by July 31, 2015. Submissions will not be returned to the contestants. Papers must be typed in Times New Roman 12 point font, double spaced, and should not bear the instructor's comments or grade. Three copies must be provided. A cover sheet must list the author's name, address, phone number, year of study, school affiliation and department, and the name of the instructor for whom the paper was written.

Entries should be sent to:

The Corresponding Secretary
Simcoe County Historical Association
P.O. Box 144
Barrie, ON L4M 4S9

Adjudication: Entries will be judged by a distinguished panel appointed by the Simcoe County Historical Association. The winners will be announced as soon as possible. Contestants should keep the SCHA aware of their contact information.

Award: There will be two awards offered in Canadian funds, one for \$500 for the best undergraduate essay and one for \$500 for the best undergraduate thesis. The Simcoe County Historical Association may edit the winning entries for the purpose of publication.

The Simcoe County Historical Association is under no obligation to grant the awards. For more information, see www.simcoecountyhistory.ca



The SCHA acknowledges the financial support of the County of Simcoe and of the Government of Ontario through the Ministry of Culture.



COMING EVENTS

of our Member Societies

Alliston Historical Society – contact

Jackie Baillie

705-435-5626 or

cknowles@rogers.com

Meet at Museum on the Boyne,

Fletcher Cres., Alliston 2:00 p.m.

Second Wednesday of the month

February- June and October-November

Barrie Historical Association –

contact Mark Fisher

www.barriehistorical.com

Sept. 16 and Nov. 18 – Joint meetings
with SCHA

**Collingwood District Historical
Society – contact Joan Miller**

705-445-1119

Meet at Leisure Time Club, 100

Minnesota Street, Collingwood – 7:00

p.m. www.historicallyspeakingcdhs.ca

Oct. 6 – Dean Hollin – Ghost Stories
of Collingwood

Nov. 3 – Carole Stuart – Collingwood's
Forgotten Heroes

Essa Historical Society – contact

Olive Lee 705-458-9971

teddylee1@rogers.com

Meet at Thornton Library fourth

Saturday of the month except July,

August and December – 1:30 p.m.

Friends of Historic Fort Willow –

contact Gord Hanson fortwillow.com

Sept. 13 – see page 2

Friends of The OPP Museum –

contact Ellen Blauger

705-330-4178

support@oppmuseumfriends.ca

**Genealogical Society – contact Linda
Mitchell**

Meet at Church of Jesus Christ of

Latter-Day Saints 79 Ferris Lane, Barrie

– 2:00 p.m. www.simcoeboogs.com

Sept. 6 – Rick Roberts – Organization

Oct. 4 – To be determined

Nov. 1 – Clint Lovell – Barrie
Servicemen

Huronian Museum Huron

Ouendat Village

549 Little Lake Park Road, Midland –

705-526-2844

www.huroniamuseum.com

Innisfil Historical Society – contact

Donna Wice

Meet at Knock Community Centre,

10th SR at 9th Line, Innisfil – 2:00

p.m. www.innisfilhistorical.ca

Sept. 20 – Students from Nantyr share
their recent D-Day anniversary
experience

Oct. 18 – A panel of Innisfil WW2
Veterans

Nov. 15 – Annual Dinner, AGM and
review of 2014 activities

Museum on the Boyne – contact

Katie Huddleston-Naieb

250 Fletcher Crescent in Riverdale

Park, Alliston – 705-435-3900 ext.

1802

Orillia History Speaker Series –

contact Daniel Byers

Meet on the 3rd floor of the Orillia

Museum of Art & History, 30 Peter

Street South. – 7:30 p.m.

Oct. 15 – Andy Monk – Hanoverian
Scandals

Nov. 19 Dave Town – Hot Foot (Walter
Knox)

Orillia Museum of Art and History

30 Peter Street South, Orillia –

705-326-2159 www.orilliamuseum.org

Sept. 26-28 – Culture Days

Museum Displays

to Oct. 4 – Carmichael Canadian
Landscape Exhibition

to May 9, 2015 – World War

Penetanguishene Centennial

Museum and Archives – contact

Nicole Jackson

13 Burke St. at Beck Blvd.

Call 705-549-2150

www.pencenmuseum.com

Sept. 27 – Settlers' Day Dinner
honouring the descendants of the
Military and Naval Establishment

Ramara Historical Society – contact

Cathy Westcott

westcott.cathy963@gmail.com

Meet at Udney Community Centre,
2347 Concession Road 10 (east of
Orillia)

7:00 p.m. Third Thursday of the month
(except July and August)

Sept. 13 – Ramona Fall Fair

Sept. 18 – Erika Neher – Glenn Gould

Oct. 16 – Bruce McRae – Picnics of
Strawberry Island 'back in the day'

Nov. 20 – Annual General Meeting
Election of Officers for 2015

John Kinghorn – his Uncle's military
history and personal military items

Dec. 18 – Potluck Social

Simcoe County Museum – contact

Kelley Swift-Jones

1151 Highway 26, Midhurst –

705-728-3721 museum.simcoe.ca

Oct. 18 – Last Blast Equipment Event

Dec. 4 & 5 – Christmas Past and
Present

Stayner Heritage Society – contact

Dorothy Millsap

www.staynerheritagesociety.com

705-428-2540

**Tecumseth & West Gwillimbury
Historical Society – contact Patricia
Blackstock**

Meet at Tec We Gwill Hall, Newton
Robinson, 7:30 p.m.

Third Monday of the month January-
May and September-November 416-
247-6551

Sept. 15 – Louis Theriault – Carver

Oct. 20 Carolyn Knowles – WW1 on
the Home Front

Nov. 17 – Remembrance Day Theme
