

Cornwall Township Historical Society

July 2007



NEWSLETTER

Separate School Board
deemed surplus and n



The History of the Cornwall Township Historical Society

As time continues to claim more of the founding members of the Cornwall Township Historical Society, I thought it appropriate that we should document the genesis of our organization and our home, the Raisin River Heritage Center. After talking to a few current members of the CTHS, the name of Wilfred Amell continually was mentioned. I called Mr. Amell and not only was I well received; he also provided me with well-documented published newspaper articles with which I was able to draw on for many facts and dates in order to complete this article. Thank you Wilfred Amell.

The CTHS was formed in December 1977 and incorporated in 1979 in large measure through the efforts of Wilfred Amell. What began as a one-man crusade to save the old convent from demolition resulted in the formation of the CTHS and what we now call our home: the Raisin River Heritage Centre.

Let's first step back a few years to review how things all began. When the convent was constructed in 1908 (this is the second building, the first was lost to fire), it was operated by the sisters of Notre Dame until 1918. The Sisters of St. Joseph followed until June of 1976. The building remained closed with no heat. Since the building came under the jurisdiction of the S.D. &G.

educational purpose; therefore, it should be demolished. Hearing of the impending demolition of the building in the fall of 1977, Mr. Amell became the driving force and chief spokesman in the effort to save the building. Mr. Amell circulated a petition and was able to gather 552 names of people who showed their support. Armed with this local interest, he approached the Cornwall Township Council asking the township to purchase the building. Council felt that this was not within their mandate; however, they told Mr. Amell that perhaps some historical organization or group could take it over and operate a museum through grants. A reprieve from demolition was given in November when the council agreed to declare the building a heritage structure. This motion by council could only protect the building from the wrecker's ball for six months.

With local public interest now working in his favor, Mr. Amell was able to gather a group of like minded community individuals and formed the CTHS holding the first meeting December 7, 1977 in the parish hall. President was Wilfred Amell; Felix McLaughlin vice president; Theresa Quinn secretary, Anastasia and Eddie Beaudette membership chairmen; Aileen McDonald publicity chairman and Patrick Wheeler treasurer. The CTHS began to move quickly on two matters. The first was to see what

sort of funding from the Ministry of Culture might be available to operate a museum; second to convince township council to hold a hearing with the Ontario Conservation Review Board. A favorable board ruling would secure long term heritage designation of the building and improve prospects for funding a museum.

On September 28 and November 2, 1978 in the Cornwall Township hall, the Ontario Conservation Review Board held a hearing. Arguments in favor of retaining the building were presented to chairman Mr. E.V. Swain of Kingston by various citizens and historical groups. It was suggested that the building is part of a circle of various historical sites around the village of St. Andrews. The school board objected to any historical designation for "practical" reasons. The land on which the old convent sits would be needed to expand the school.

On November 2, 1978, Mr. Swain handed down his ruling that protects the building under provisions of the Ontario Heritage Act. Township council followed up on this ruling by preparing a bylaw designating the convent a historic site, thus protecting it for another 180 days. Since the site was still owned by the school board, little could be done by the CTHS at that point in having the old convent play a new and useful role in the community.

With the school board holding firm on its intent to have the building demolished for school expansion but unable to do so because of its heritage designation, the building continued to fall into disrepair. The CTHS could not seek any funding to operate a museum since they did not have any title or access to the vacant building. On October 3 1979, township council convened a meeting to discuss the issues with the school board and the CTHS. The school board sent no one to the meeting; however, Lois Smith, the new president of the CTHS claimed the reasons given by the board for the removal of the old convent were groundless. Council tended to agree.

Finally in February 1980 after negotiations between the board and a township committee consisting of Reeve John Cleary and Councilor Myles Chisholm, an agreement was reached whereby the board would convey the building along with a five-foot strip of land around it to the Township of Cornwall for the amount of \$1.00. Several conditions relating to the operation of the building were attached to the deal the biggest of which was that the township was given 36 months in which to "refurbish" it. If this condition was not met, ownership would revert to the board that would then proceed with demolition.

The campaign to save the historic St. Andrews Convent from the wrecker's ball had finally met with success. Now the challenge facing the CTHS was to prepare the building for a museum and cultural center of some sort in no more than 36 months. No small task was facing our members in those days. The building had been vacant for over three years at this point. Pipes had burst. Windows were broken. It must have been very disheartening at the beginning.

In order for museums to qualify for funding, they must be open to the public for a specified number of hours per year. One of the conditions agreed to with the board was that the operation could not interfere with school hours. Therefore, it was decided that the museum would operate and be open to the public on Sunday afternoons through July and August.

With time, we are seeing fewer and fewer founding CTHS members. Let us not forget the perseverance and fortitude they must have had in seemingly insurmountable odds protecting and restoring one of our historic jewels. I can only think that our ancestors who landed on the banks of the Raisin River on November 30, 1784 must have faced similar odds. However, both generations over came these odds and are heritage is stronger for that.

Also, let us not take for granted that the Heritage Center will be here forever, given its heritage status. Should the building fall into disrepair, one can be certain that the school board would resurrect the old arguments in favor of demolition. It is only through the efforts, large or small, of the members of the CTHS that we can pass this historical asset on to future generations.

Submitted by: Don McIntosh

Thank you

Many thanks to the volunteers who did Spring Clean-up of the Heritage Centre on June 13th, 2007 :Sharon McCullough, Alma and Ken McDonald, Margaret MacDonald, Edith McPhail, Audrey McPhee, Hubert Chisholm, Dale Duncan and to Maureen McAlear who had previously waged war with the flies and scrubbed the floor in the main floor kitchen and wash-room area. The following evening she did a tour of inspection of the second floor, five room museum and the basement kitchen and large and small dining rooms and stated " everything sparkled " .Bernie had been there in the morning repairing something about the kitchen counter but he always cleans up after himself.

Summer Tours

On May 21st, 2007 we were pleased to receive 16 members of Martintown Women's Institute who toured the Heritage Centre and held their meeting in our building. Many thanks to those who provided and served their lunch and to Don McIntosh who gave a brief talk about the history of St. Andrews W. and the Raisin River Heritage Centre, and to Mary (Quinn)

McDonald, their hostess, who organized the event. Their complimentary comments and generous donation were most appreciated. Any members who live at a distance or have not seen **YOUR** Centre since the huge restorations done by Bernie MacDonald, his crew and their predecessors, would be wise to include it in your holiday plans. The Centre is open summer Sundays, July and August, 2 to 4 PM or phone any of the following people for an arranged tour :Dale 613-534-2463; Don 613-534-2075; Maureen 613-932-4390; Ranald 613-937-3177; Theresa 613-932-2546 .

For Rent

Don't forget, the main floor meeting rooms and/or the downstairs kitchen and two dining rooms are for rent for "responsible" gatherings. Downstairs is \$75. plus \$25. cover which is returned to you if you leave it the way you found it i.e. neat and clean. Main floor meeting room with use of washrooms and tea kitchen is priced according to length of time required. Arrangements to rent any sections should be made through Terry Trueman at 613-938-2927

Congratulations

CONGRATULATIONS TO:

- (a)** Members Pearl Murray, Edmund (Eddie) Beaudette and Maureen McAlear who were recipients of Ontario Heritage Foundation Certificates of Achievement " in appreciation of achievement in heritage conservation to identify, preserve, protect and promote our province's rich heritage" .
- (b)** Our valued member Sharon McCullough who, with friend Monique Dawkes of Long Sault, won a gold medal in the Bocce Tournament for Ontario Senior Games played in Cornwall on May 22, 2007.

(c) Our President, Ranald McDonell, who won a beautiful painting of the Long Sault Rapids donated to Lost Villages Historical Society by our member and accomplished artist Brenda Alguire.

Sympathies

Our sympathies go out to Theresa Wheeler and family on the death of James Anthony (Tony) in his 88th year. Both our long-time members, Theresa (our Treasurer for 12 years until 2006) and Tony had been married 55 years and had 4 children and 14 grandchildren. Tony was inducted to Cornwall Sports Hall of Fame (Lacross) 1984 and South Stormont Sports Hall of Fame (Lacross) 2006. The latter was accepted in his stead by Theresa. A proud legacy.

Historical Memories

In response to many requests, a compilation of the past 20 years of Newsletters written by Marland and Pearl Murray has been made into a book. Entitled "Historical Memories", it may be obtained by phoning any of the people listed above (re tours) or by writing: Cornwall Township Historical Society, 17144 County Road 36, St. Andrews W., Ontario K0C 2A0 .

It is also for sale at: Lost Villages "General Store" on Hwy.2; Sue's Gallery, Flowers Cornwall or Hooked on Books in Cornwall. The cost is \$25.00 for pick up or delivery plus ship & handle of about \$8 or \$9 if mailed.

The Murrays thank the people who contributed stories and pictures, etc. and Cornwall Township Historical Society for continued encouragement - especially Don McIntosh and Maureen McAlear for many hours spent getting this book published. All proceeds have been kindly donated to

Cornwall Township Historical Society by the Murrays "for the preservation of history in the area".

Sorry you missed...

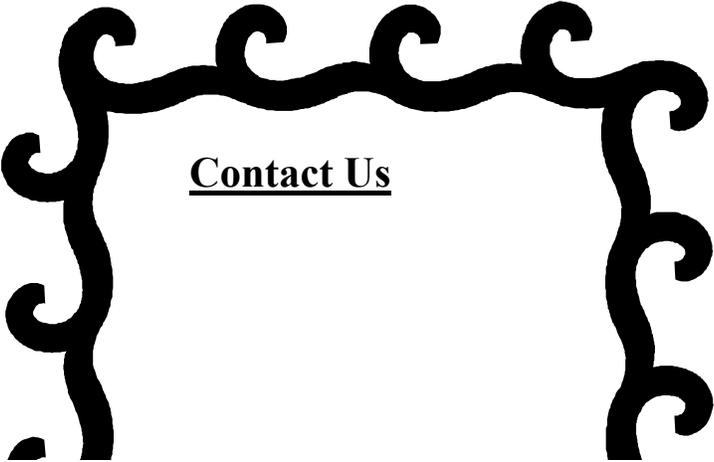
Sorry if you missed the June Pot-Luck dinner. The food and fun keeps getting better. Lots of V.I.P. attended for the Ontario Heritage Foundation presentations but Fr. Ken O'Keefe cancelled as speaker as he had a wedding.

Mark your Calendars

Do, please, mark your calendar NOW for the next 2 meetings:

Wednesday, August 1st, 7:30 PM for the Simon Fraser Celebration planning committee and

Tuesday, September 25th, 2007 at 7:30 PM. Speaker will be Jane McDonald of C.N.I.B. who will tell about Accessing Information For People With Vision Problems. Of course both in the Centre and, of course, EVERYONE WELCOME to both and bring a friend.



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