



Outlook

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Belleville, A Popular History

By Gerry Boyce

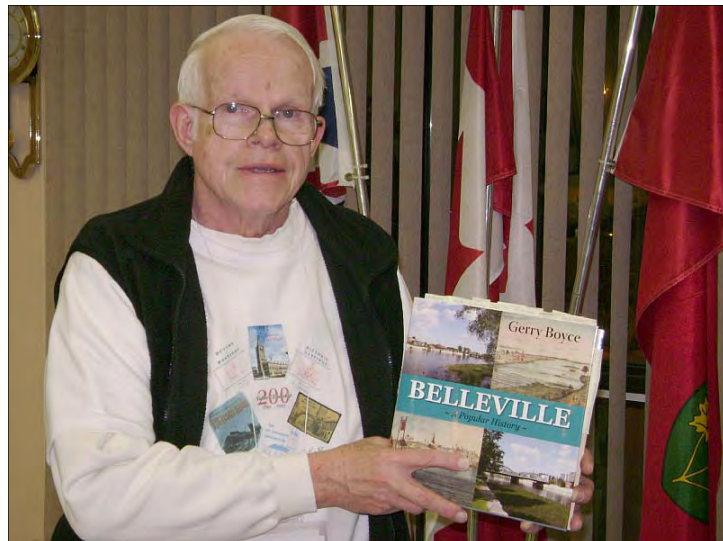
*Review by Orland French,
President, Hastings County
Historical Society*

Gerry Boyce asks, with a wry smile and a twinkle in his eye, how a book could be titled “popular” until it has proven itself in the market. He needn’t have worried. Launched only on December 3, 2008, the popular book’s 500 hardcover copies sold out long before Christmas. Late shoppers have been left to purchase the paperback version.

As Gerry is no doubt aware, a “popular history” is one which people take delight in reading. Popular

histories may be every bit as fact-packed as more ponderous academic tomes but they are written and presented in a style that makes them a joy to read. Pierre Berton was sometimes criticized by high foreheads for writing history in a popular fashion, but he didn’t care. Because of his popular style, hundreds of thousands of Canadians learned more about their country.

And so it is with Gerry’s book. It is an informal personal journey through Belleville’s history. (Consequently the author is listed as Gerry Boyce, not Gerald E. Boyce as in earlier books.) Anyone who has heard one of



Gerry Boyce with a copy of his latest book *Belleville, A Popular History*. Gerry was guest speaker at the Society’s January meeting. In this issue of Outlook his book is reviewed by HCHS President, Orland French.
Photo, Doug Knutson

Gerry’s presentations at the Hastings County Historical Society, Loyalist College, or a dozen other venues around town, will hear the familiar Boyce voice echoing in their inner ear as they read his delightful stories. Gerry is non-judgmental of the antics of Belleveillians but he often throws in a wry comment based on 21st century observation. When a company proposed hiring 75 “men and girls” to produce radios in 1929, the thoroughly modern Gerry adds: “Apparently no women need apply!”

At the January meeting of the Hastings County Historical Society, Gerry entertained a crowd of 40 people with samples of his lifetime collection of Belleville vignettes. He didn’t get around to all of them, by any means. Who knew that the young and mischievous Farley Mowat would fish used condoms out of the Moira, fill them with water, and drop them on unsuspecting pedestrians passing by the Belleville library?

This is no prissy history
cont’d. on page 4

The Kilties’ Ship S.S. Southwark



On September 10, 1904 Belleville’s world famous Kilties Band sailed for England aboard the “elegant” twin-screw steamer S.S. Southwark. The brochure from which this picture was reproduced states that the Southwark “is lighted throughout by electricity and is replete

with every modern comfort and convenience; the steadiness of the ship permitted daily rehearsals by the band” and “one special concert was given in aid of the Seamen’s Benefit Fund.” For more on the Kilties and their exploits turn the page.

Belleville's Kilties Embark On European Tour



Front Street, Belleville, Friday, September 9, 1904: The grand send-off for the famed Belleville Kilties Band. After a successful tour of the United States the previous season the band was bound for Europe and a command performance before Edward VII. It was proclaimed the greatest Scottish band in the world and the pride of all Canada! "We trust," said Belleville's Mayor W.W. Chown at the time, "that you may be the means of bringing to the attention of our brothers across the sea, the many advantages of Canada and particularly of our own beautiful city of Belleville and

Belleville's Kilties Draw Record Crowd To Crystal Palace in London!



WM. F. ROBINSON,
Conductor of the "Kilties" Band.

On the afternoon of Saturday, September 24, 1904 a record crowd of 176,000 people turned out to hear the Kilties Band of Belleville play at London's Crystal Palace under the baton of its conductor William F.

Robinson (above photo). It was the opening performance of what was to be a wildly successful tour of Great Britain.

No sooner had the band arrived than they received a command to appear before King Edward VII at Balmoral Castle. Their "flying trip" to the Scottish Highlands and their successful performance before His Majesty made them front page news.

In 1908 the Kilties would leave Belleville on a world tour that would last over two years. The Hastings County Heritage Centre has a good collection of photographs from that tour which *Outlook* will share with its readers in an upcoming issue.



Robinson (above photo). It was the open-

The Belleville Reminiscences of E.S. Vandewater ~ Part 3

In the spring of 2008 the Historical Society received a letter from Richard J. Moran of Redford, Missouri. Attached to his letter were reminiscences of life in the Belleville area written by his great uncle Edgar Smith Vandewater. Here is Part 3 of Vandewater's story.

I don't remember who lived on the southwest corner of

Roderick Bain MacKenzie Kilties Band Drum Major



In the January issue of *Outlook* we showed a picture of this man and identified him only as "one of the finest specimens of manhood in all Canada, and it is doubtful if a more striking soldier lives." This sterling description of

John and Bridge, but south of this residence on John Street was the Lingham's who owned a large sawmill on the bay shore at the south end of Foster Avenue. In connection with this mill he had a large dock where all the boys in East Belleville, including myself, learned to swim. Boys' bathing suits were unheard of then.

Getting back to Bridge Street, going west, was St. Thomas Church Rectory, with Canon Burke as Rector, a very outstanding personality. Crossing Church Street was Carmen Opera House, owned by Thomas Carmen *cont'd. on page 4*

him was taken from a Kilties Souvenir Album that recorded the exploits of the band in Great Britain and the United States. His name is Roderick Bain MacKenzie, "The Famous Drum Major of the Kilties," and he stood seven feet one and a half inches tall. The photo of him on the left is titled "Twa Scot-ties." The boy beside him is unidentified.

The souvenir album goes on to say that "the programme rendered before the King and his guests in the ball room at Balmoral Castle was one of the most diversified ever played by the Kilties. The Royal audience applauded every number heartily and the gentlemen of the party wore kilts in honour of the Kilties. At the conclusion of the programme His Majesty left his seat and walking to the band expressed his genuine pleasure saying that he had never before enjoyed a band concert as he had enjoyed the Kilties

Included among the King's guests were The Prince and Princess of Wales, Prince Ferdinand of Teck, The Right Honourable A.J. Balfour, Lord Farquar, Viscount Church-

ill and Antarctic explorer and Commander of HMS *Discovery*, Robert Scott.

Prior to their departure for England the Kilties were addressed by Belleville Mayor W.W. Chown:

The citizens of Belleville, as you are aware, have on many occasions, manifested, in a modest way, their appreciation of your talents, but it is now felt that as you are about to visit the Home Land of the Empire, of which Canada is so proud to form a part, we should manifest that appreciation in some more public manner, and through you, to our friends across the sea.



We do heartily and unreservedly commend you to our fellow citizens of that portion of the Empire you are about to visit, as gentlemen, musicians of ability and worthy citizens of the Empire.

We feel assured that your approaching tour will not only be of substantial advantage to yourselves, but will also be another thread knit into the warp and woof (*sic*) of the Empire. May God be with you till we meet again.

Belleville, A Popular History *cont'd from page 1*

book. Prostitutes share equal treatment with politicians and poets. When Gerry writes about "Sex in the Seventies", he isn't musing about his lost youth. He's referring to the 1870s when Belleville seemed to have had an influx of young women who entertained men. He theorizes that "the young ladies came from outside the city and stayed briefly." Not unlike today, one might speculate.

Murder, mystery and mayhem – Gerry's stock in trade as a guide of walking tours – abound throughout. As the publisher's web site puts it, "Embedded throughout are interesting and obscure stories about scandals, murders, and hauntings -- the underbelly of the growth of a city." Small wonder Gerry wanted to call the book "What the Chamber of Commerce won't tell you."

The book is amply illustrated with archival photos, not surprisingly many of them supplied by the Hast-

ings County Historical Society. Gerry was one of the founders of the Society in 1957, has served as its president more than once, and is currently its Heritage Advisor and workshop coordinator.

Gerry served 32 years as a teacher and educator, but he did not stop working upon his retirement. He's still teaching us history that is fun to read.

Belleville, A Popular History, Gerry Boyce, 304 pages, Natural Heritage Books Dundurn Press, 2008, \$32.99 paperback. Available from the author and at local bookstores.

E.S. Vandewater ~ Part 3 *cont'd. from page 3*

who also owned the Ontario Printing Company and lived in a beautiful residence on Dundas Street. From the Opera House to Pinnacle Street was John Lake's Livery Stable and office. Across Pinnacle Street was the Post Office, about the busiest spot in the

Notes On *The Kilties March*



city as everyone had to call for their own mail.

Next west was Pitceathly and Kelso's wholesale grocery warehouse, then was Wallbridge and Clarks' stores, a liquor store and a very fine grocery and on the the northeast corner of Bridge and Front was Donald Walter's Drug Store. Across Front Street was the Balmoral Hotel.

to be cont'd.

A Rest Warrant?

Yesterday, police were called to a Bridge Street day care centre where a three-year-old was resisting a rest.

NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, February 17, 2009

Speaker

Tom Riddolls

Topic

United Empire Loyalists

Monthly meetings start at 7:30 and are held in the Auditorium of the Quinte Living Centre, 370 Front Street, Belleville

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HCHS MEMBER ADDRESS