

Here's to the Lovely Lilacs of Lonsdale

by Orland French

May is the month of lilacs, and one of the prettiest places to view the wonders of this marvellous flower is in the village of Lonsdale. In fact, you will find splashes of colourful lilacs throughout Hastings County, each of them marking pioneer settlements where lilacs were among the favourites of flowering bushes. Lilacs are not indigenous to Canada, having been imported by settlers from Europe. They are apparently native to Eastern and parts of Asia. If you've got a lilac in your garden, it's imported. In Canada, even with our roughhouse climate, they are as persistent as rhubarb – you can hardly uproot and discourage a lilac from flourishing. And flourish they do in the Salmon River valley at Lonsdale. It's worth the drive.

As Gerry Boyce writes in his recent book *Historic Hastings, Volume Two*: “Many people maintain that Lonsdale is the most picturesque community in the county. Arguably, this may be true, given the number of stone structures and other historic buildings that have survived from the 19th century and have been, or are being, lovingly protected and restored. Among the most prominent heritage buildings is the former flour and grist mill. The mill, which operated almost continually from 1829 until the 1960s, was purchased by Jerry and Suzie Gutzman in the mid-1980s, and gradually restored and transformed into a very attractive

and spacious family home. “Painters, artists, sketchers and scribblers of all kinds are forever setting up easels across the road from the place.”

When I moved to this area over 30 years ago, I contemplated living in the countryside somewhere near Belleville. Real estate ads encouraged me to take a look at “Lovely Lonsdale”! I had no idea where it was, until I discovered it on the Salmon River near other well-known villages such as Empey Hill, Kingsford and Melrose. So Sylvia and I took a drive out northeast of Belleville and found the two mill sites mentioned by Gerry, a pair of historic single-lane pony truss iron bridges leapfrogging across the river, a collection of beautiful heritage houses, even a deserted bookstore – and clouds of lilacs: white, lavender, purple and other exotic colours.

The rocky surfaces of Eastern Ontario may not be conducive to growing many crops, but lilacs love the calcareous soils atop the limestone layers of sediment of Eastern Ontario. That's why you will find clouds of lilacs seemingly sweeping across farmlands in this area. And, yes, in southern reaches of Prince Edward County too, where the bushes cling to the edges of limestone cliffs.

Lilacs are both pretty and common in the springtime. Historian and writer Andrea Eiding, in an essay on the internet, has uncovered some interesting references to lilacs through Canadian history. She points out that the introduction of lilacs to North America was part of the efforts to colonize a wild continent and make it feel like

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home. "Every lilac bush you've ever seen is a descendent of one of those first few brought over here in a deliberate attempt to colonize North America." However, she notes that lilacs did not easily propagate in the wild. "Whenever you encounter a lilac bush in the countryside, you are likely standing in the middle of an abandoned homestead." That is probably true, but the lilacs continue to live and spread well beyond the original homestead. Once they take root, they're off and running.



Lonsdale Bridge

Photo by Orland French

Eidinger has uncovered historical references to lilacs in the warden's garden at Kingston Penitentiary, around 1850. "While inmates endured corporal punishment and inadequate food, penitentiary inspectors were spending their time tending to flower gardens." She also notes that Canada has applied its particular nature to lilacs. The Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa collected and cultivated varieties of lilacs from all over the world, including developing a species more resistant to harsh Canadian winters.

At my childhood home in northern Simcoe County, we had several decorative lilacs alongside the highway. Motorists stopped to help themselves to samples; we found one woman in our backyard snipping off branches of a darker-hued flower. Haven't we all stopped and clipped a collection of "wild" lilacs at the roadside?

Further information: Unwritten Histories – <https://www.unwrittenhistories.com/ode-to-lilacs-in-the-springtime/>. Andrea Eidinger holds history degrees from McGill University and the University of Victoria.



Historical Society Sets 2023 Team

Each year the Historical Society holds its Annual General Meeting in March at which the Board of Directors for the coming year is elected. Then, at a Board meeting in early April, the executive (president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary) is elected and the heads of the various committees are appointed.

The Board of Directors for 2023 will be led by President Gary Nicoll. Gary has served on the Board since 2020 and has served as Secretary since 2021. Like others in the Historical Society, he has had a lifetime interest in history and particularly in local history. He has lived in Hastings County since 1985, moving to Belleville from Alliston and before that from Toronto. One of his first purchases here was Gerry Boyce's *Historic Hastings*. Gary worked for 40 years in the printing industry and was involved in the publication of a number of local history books and for many years produced local history-based calendars for distribution in Eastern Ontario. He is looking for support from his fellow Board of Directors and from the many volunteers that have made the HCHS successful for so many years to continue the excellent work done by our Presidents over the last two decades.

Moving to Past-president, after ten years in the chair, Dick Hughes congratulated the new president and vowed to continue working with the Board in carrying out the Society's community programs in 2023 and beyond. He noted that the past decade had been a very successful time, highlighted by the development and opening of the Community Archives, largely through the inspiration and fundraising efforts of Orland French, the installation of seventeen historical plaques all across Hastings County and the expansion of the monthly Public Presentations at Maranatha programs.

The ambitious list of community programs will be administered by directors Dan Atkinson, Ted Bradford, Connie Carson, Stanley Jones, Jim

Kennelly, Steve Young and Michelle Hutchison. Archivist Amanda Hill continues in an ex officio capacity. Their areas of responsibility are set out on page 8.

After more than twenty years of inspired and devoted service, Orland French has decided to take his leave. Orland served ten years as president and a further ten years as past-president. During his administration, he extended and strengthened the role of the Society across the whole community and launched several very successful programs.

We, as a Board and also as the larger Historical Society, want to also thank Gerry Fraiberg, who has served as Vice President for the last couple of years and handled many successful projects.

The entire Board looks forward to bringing new, informative and entertaining programs to our community in 2023 and developing further the amazing and colourful history of Hastings County.



Incoming president of the Historical Society, Gary Nicoll, received the gavel from outgoing president, Dick Hughes.



The Founding of the Murchison Club

by Trevor Parsons

During the early 1870s, Belleville's leading educators and scientists came together to found a scientific society dedicated to studying the natural world around them. With the goals of promoting research, scientific knowledge, and natural history of the surrounding area, the Murchison Club was formed in June 1873.

The very first public meeting took place on 1 August at Shire Hall. It featured an address by James T. Bell, the Hastings professor of mining and agriculture at Albert University, outlining the objectives of the society. An exhibition included a harnessed tiger moth from Daniel Ackerill and J.T. Bell's flint fragments found behind Christ Church and an 'Indian' arrowhead. It was noted in *The Daily Intelligencer's* report that John Macoun's "promised notes on botanizing" would be delivered at a future date due to the professor's absence.

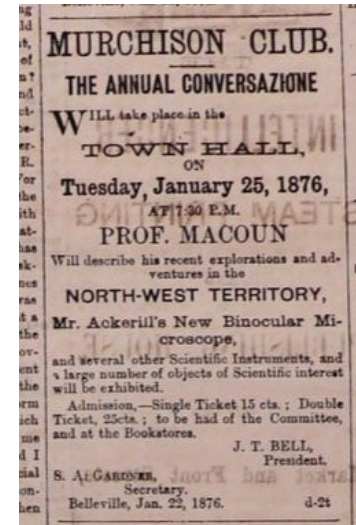
Despite his initial absence, Macoun became a regular speaker, usually on the topic of his various travels. In April 1876, for example, he spoke of his recent trip to British Columbia where he brought back various sea-weeds from Vancouver Island which were then examined under microscopes brought by John Evans and Daniel Ackerill. According to *The Daily Intelligencer*, "powerful instruments ... made the most minute peculiarities of their formation plain and distinct to the vision. The rays of the circular diatoms, and the cross bars which connected these rays, formed most beautiful and interesting objects, and the structure of the smallest and most delicate sea-weeds, and even the spores or minute sea-germs, became distinctly visible."

Exhibits were regular features of each meeting with an assortment of stuffed animals, exotic fauna, from Barbados and the near-Arctic, insect specimens, fossils, and 'Indian' artifacts all

displayed at various meetings. At the April 1879 meeting, James Bell presented a 10½ pound "meteoric stone" that fell in Oxford County in 1876 and given to him upon a recent visit to Ingersoll.

It was not long until the club partnered with Albert University establishing a joint museum on the school's premises. Club members, a number of whom were professors at Albert University, donated an array of specimens from their personal collections joining the already substantive collection held by the university. It was noted in *Astrum Alberti*, the university paper, that "a museum in connection with a University is not a thing simply of interest, pleasing to the sight, but is of inestimable value in teaching the several branches of Natural Science." Growing to more than sixty members, the Murchison Club included many leading citizens from headmasters of several schools, county officials, engineers and

architects, and of course, some of the faculty of Albert University. The club featured stimulating debates on the latest advances in biology, chemistry, physics, and geology at a time of great technological change.



PUBLIC PRESENTATION

By researcher

SHEILA REESOR



The Aylward Murder, Trial and Hangings at Belleville in 1862

An altercation over free-ranging chickens led to the death of William Munro and the public hanging of Mary and Richard Aylward in Belleville. Sheila Reesor takes another look at the Aylwards' trial and explores life in Doyle's Corners (Maynooth) at the time of the incident.



**Tuesday,
May 16, 2023
7:30 p.m.**

**Maranatha Church Auditorium
100 College Street West, Belleville
Enter by main front doors**

It's Reading Time Again

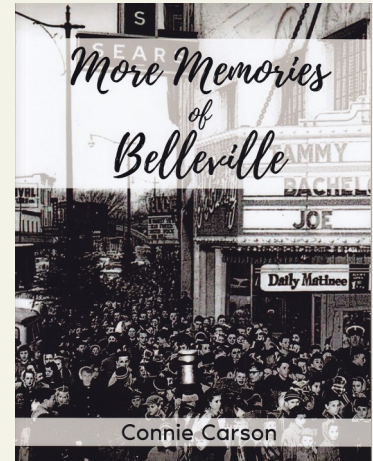
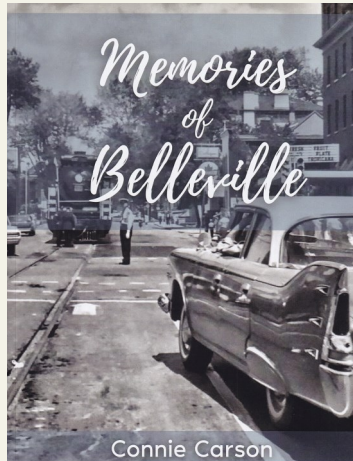
by Michelle Hutchison

Ah, the joys of a beautiful spring day! The showers of April are behind us and the flowers of May are upon us! The weather is ripe for sitting in the sun and reading a new book full of local history. May we suggest ...

Do you remember ... did you ever wonder ... what Belleville was like if you were a kid growing up in 1950- or 60-something? Walk along the downtown streets. Listen to some of the tales that have made this fair city what it is today. Caught in the clutches of the pandemic, author Connie Carson found herself with some time to fill. What to do? Ever resourceful, she reached out to others who have called Belleville home, whether now or in the past. Out of this came a Facebook group called "Sharing Belleville Memories," and that they did with zest, regaling one another with anecdotes about distant and not-so-distant times. There are stories that are sure to bring a resounding "Yes, I remember that!" There are stories that are sometimes salty, sometimes sweet and often amusing. *Memories of Belleville* and *More Memories of Belleville* offer a glimpse of yesteryear and are chock full of wonderful photos to aid in your journey back in time. So, whether you're a born-and-bred Bellevillian or new to town, sit back, relax and enjoy the trip.

\$30 each 78 pages

Find both of these fine books, along with many others at the HCHS bookstore, housed at the Community Archives in Belleville.



Belleville Votes and Riots!

by Richard Hughes

As long as we can remember, voting at all levels of government has been a rather quiet and orderly experience. More recently, voting has even been possible without leaving our homes. But it has not always been such a controlled and peaceful act. You have to go way back to October 1842 and the election for the Canadian Legislative Assembly (today's House of Commons) when staunch Tory Edmund Murney ran against

Reformer Robert Baldwin. The returning officer in charge of the election was Sheriff Dunbar Moodie, husband of famous author Susanna Moodie.

These two had run against each other a year earlier in a very acrimonious contest, so the scene was set for a battle royal in 1842. When the polls opened on October 3, 1842, groups of armed citizens challenged each other and blocked the paths of citizens who might vote for the opposing candidate. Recall, at that time voting was very limited, basically to men over 21 who owned property and was carried out over six days.

Furthermore, voting was done verbally, with the voter announcing their preference publicly and the entire scene often fueled by copious amounts of alcohol.

With the voting seriously disrupted, Moodie called in the militia and swore in special constables. Even this was not sufficient, so Sheriff Moodie asked for and was given permission to bring in two companies of regular troops from Kingston. Even this, the militia, special constables and regular troops could not calm the rioters who continued to block the routes to the polls and seriously intimidate voters. When the votes were finally counted, Murney had 482 to Baldwin's 433. In view of the violence and so many voters not being able to get to the polls, Moodie refused to certify the vote.

In the end, both sides criticized Moodie, and when a new election was called, William Hutton, first Warden of Victoria District (Hastings County), was appointed. In the second election, Edmund Murney was victorious. We could imagine the level of emotion that would carry over into the daily lives of the residents of the town of Belleville and across Hastings County for many years to come.

It would be extremely difficult, in modern times, to imagine the people of Belleville rioting in the streets, heavily armed and bent on violence. But the election riots of 1842 were not the last time the troops had to be called in to restore order in Belleville. There was also the Grand Trunk Railway strike of 1876/77 which saw two hundred officers and men of the Queen's Own Rifles from Toronto brought in to calm rioters. Elections at every level continue to arouse emotions and strong opinions, but we have come a long way from having soldiers in the streets.

This story, written by Gerald Boyce, is drawn from a series of historical stories in *Belleville The Good Old Days* by Nick and Helma Mika, published in 1975.



Coronation Day, 1953

by Amanda Hill, Archivist

In June 1953, a four-year-old boy called Charles witnessed the coronation of his mother as Elizabeth II. On Saturday May 6th, 2023, he will be anointed as Charles III.

The day of the 1953 coronation (Tuesday June 2nd) was declared a national holiday in Canada by Governor General Vincent Massey. The City of Belleville's Recreation Committee put on a day of events to celebrate including a dog show in Market Square and an evening fireworks display and beacon-lighting ceremony.

Between those events, a mile-long parade made its way from Belleville Collegiate Institute down Church Street and along Bridge Street to the fairgrounds. This included six marching bands, 1,100 people, and 30 vehicles and floats. A crowd of some 10,000 people turned out to watch (the city's population at the time was 20,000).

The Ontario Intelligencer of June 3rd described the two prize-winning floats:

An exceptionally colourful float from the Ontario School for the Deaf combined history and tradition in a tableau that included four suitably costumed girls representing Britannia, and four boys garbed in the scarlet tunics and deep blue breeches of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

A hospital float, complete with surgically gowned and masked doctors and nurses as if in the midst of an operation, was complete to the rubber gloves, and drew rounds of applause as it passed along the route of the march.

A committee judging the floats composed of city Aldermen Don Thomas, Robert Temple and Jack Bradford, awarded the O.S.D. float first prize and the hospital float second prize.



A recent donation by Joyce Foster to the Community Archives provides a record of the Belleville General Hospital's float. Hospital staff members involved were nurses Joyce Lott (later Foster, on left), Gwen Hart (centre), Anne Crabbe and Doreen Dorland, with doctors McGreer, Winfield and Barfoot.

There is a description of the Ontario School for the Deaf float in the school's publication, *The Canadian*, and the OSD/Sir James Whitney Archives holds a photograph of the float, shown here. *The Canadian* of June 1953 also mentioned the Coronation Day program produced by the City of Belleville and presented to each student of the school. This program is available in the Community Archives.



OSD Coronation Float , 1953

Photo Courtesy of OSD-SJW Archives & Museum

Perceptions of the monarchy have changed significantly since 1953, with recent polls suggesting that fewer than one in five Canadians now support the institution. It seems that mass celebrations of Coronation Day are now only to be found in the archives. ❖ ❖ ❖

April Public Presentation

Steven Lindsay-Maracle brought the story of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte to the April Public Presentation at Maranatha. He described the history of the Mohawks from their earliest times, through the time of the American Revolution, their establishment at Tyendinaga and developments up to the present.



Speaker Steven Lindsay-Maracle

Photo by Doug Knutson, Windswept Productions



A Special Announcement

The Historical Society is now able to accept payments by credit and debit card. This will facilitate the purchase of local history books either at the archives or on line or at our public presentations; sign up for membership; or make donations. We now have the "Square" payment system in place. This is one step in our new programs to refresh and modernize the systems we are using.

You have probably noticed our new logo design and look of our *Outlook* newsletter. In line with these visual adjustments already made, during this year you will see our totally new website. A lot to look forward to at the Historical Society.



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HASTINGS COUNTY
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