



# Outlook

Volume 18 Number 3

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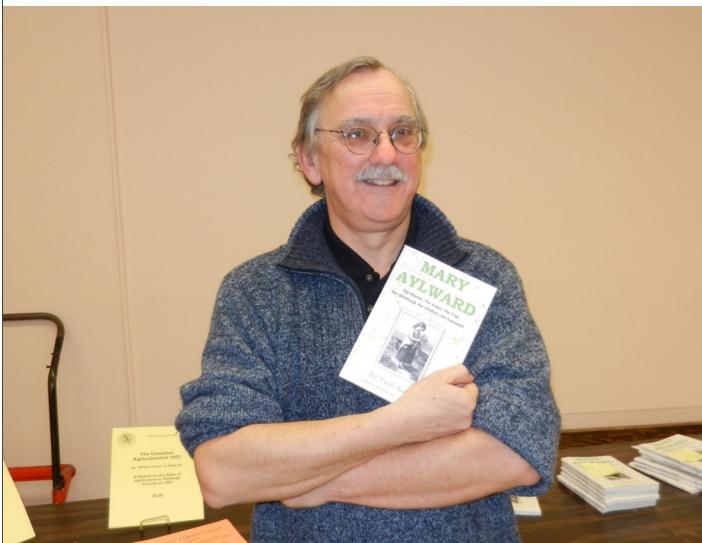
Issue Number 278

March 2013

## The Short Life of Mary Aylward From Ireland to the Gallows

By Bill Kennedy

On December 12, 1862, thousands of people gathered in Belleville for the hanging of Mary and Richard Aylward. They had been convicted of the May 16 murder of their North Hastings County neighbour William Munro who had accused them of stealing one of his hens. The hens were known to cross the road into the Aylward wheat field, and Munro believed Aylward had shot one.



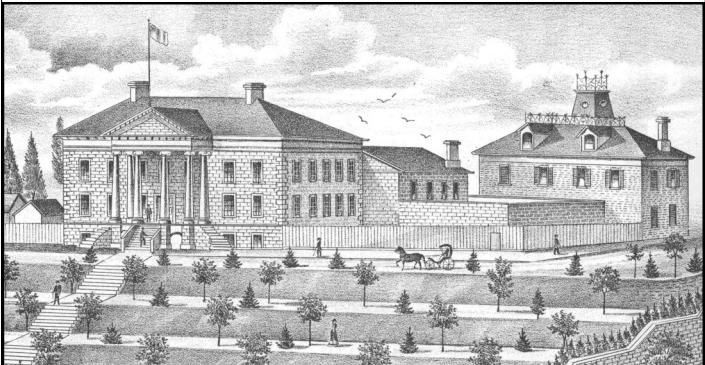
Paul Kirby, guest speaker at the March event and author of *Mary Aylward*

Aylward denied the accusation. When Munro and his son Alex went to the wheat field to look for the hen, Aylward followed them, shotgun in hand. An argument ensued, and Alex was shot in the shoulder. Hearing the gunfire, Mary Aylward came running with a scythe in hand to find her husband and Munro wrestling on the ground for control of the gun. She swung the scythe twice, seriously wounding Munro who stag-

gered home bleeding profusely. He died two weeks later.

The full story of Mary and her husband has been told by local author Paul Kirby in his book *Mary Aylward*. Under duress, she emigrated from Ireland as a child aboard a “coffin ship” to the United States, eventually met and married Richard and moved to Canada and North Hastings where free farmland was available. At the time of the murder, Mary was twenty-two years old. They had three young daughters aged four, two and a baby. During their six-month incarceration in Belleville jail, they were kept in separate cells and saw each other only once before the hanging. They never saw their children again.

Paul read excerpts from his book at the Society’s February meeting and provided background surrounding the trial and hanging. If you haven’t read the book, we recommend it. Hundreds of people signed a petition requesting that the sentence be commuted. However, in a previous Belleville murder trial that year, a Protestant man accused of a murder for which there were witnesses had gone free. There had been a great outcry over this. Did the Catholic Aylwards pay the belated price for a collective guilty conscience needing to make amends for the earlier injustice?



Belleville Courthouse at left side with the Gaol at the right  
*Historical Atlas of Hastings and Prince Edward Counties, H.B. Beldon & Co. 1878*



# Shady Corner Part 3

## The Police vs. Eddie Thomas; Why the Kid Gloves?

By C.W. (Bill) Hunt

**Part 2 has been printed in the 2013 January issue of the Outlook.**

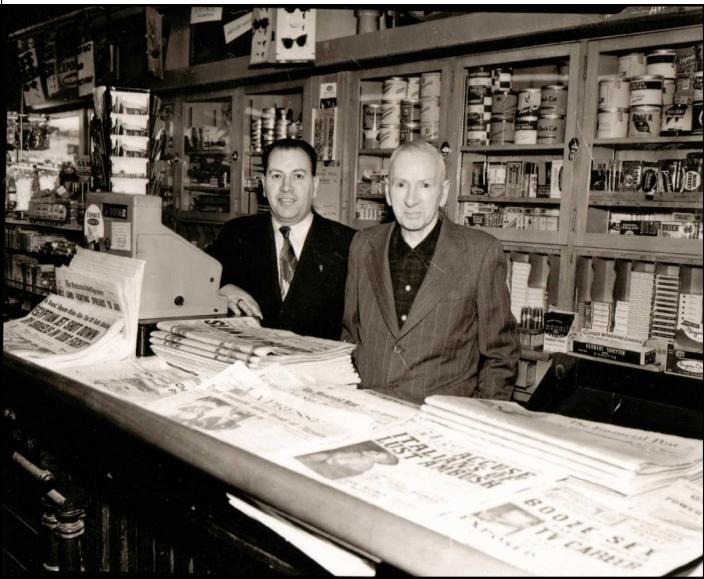
In an earlier article I noted that Ed Thomas had an amazing sixth sense which seemed to alert him to any and all upcoming raids by the Belleville Police Force on his illegal gambling establishment. This sixth sense was usually preceded by a “mysterious” phone call about half an hour before the police arrived.

There are various explanations for Ed Thomas’s ability to carry on an illegal activity literally under the noses of the city’s law enforcement establishment. Let’s look at a few of these. First, there is the “good old boys” explanation. The Thomas family had been part of the civic scene for several generations. For example, in the early 1860s, J. Parker Thomas was located on Front Street as an attorney at law, solicitor in chancery, and notary public, while John Thomas operated at the same location as a stock and insurance agent as well as a commission merchant. A few years later, from 1868 to 1869, Mrs. Ellen Thomas is listed as operating a grocery and provisions store at West Front Street. In 1909, on the death of their mother, Ed and his sister Jessie took over the family business with Jessie running the grocery and Ed the tobacco and sporting goods section of the business. Ed Thomas’s obituary in *The Intelligencer* noted that the family had been carrying on a business at that location since 1822.

Prior to taking over the family business with his sister, Ed worked as a reporter for the Morton family at *The Daily Intelligencer*. In this capacity, he came into almost daily contact with the city fathers as well as with the chiefs of the police and fire departments. These contacts would prove to be invaluable for the personable and energetic young entrepreneur.

A staunch member of the Presbyterian Church, Ed was also an avid worker for the Conservative Party as, indeed, were most of the local establishment. He further complemented these sterling qualities by totally abstaining from alcohol. Moreover, at a time when virtually every male over the age of ten smoked something:

cigars, pipes, cigarettes or, among athletes and farmers, indulged in the “chawing of baccy”; Ed touched none of these abominations. No, neither tobacco nor the demon booze ever touched the pristine lips of Eddie Thomas. However, if others were unable to resist the siren call of these iniquities, Ed was willing to supply some of them. Indeed, he did a roaring business supplying the vices of those weaker than he.



**Don and Ed Thomas stand behind a counter loaded with newspapers ca. late 1940s. Photo: Bill Hunt**

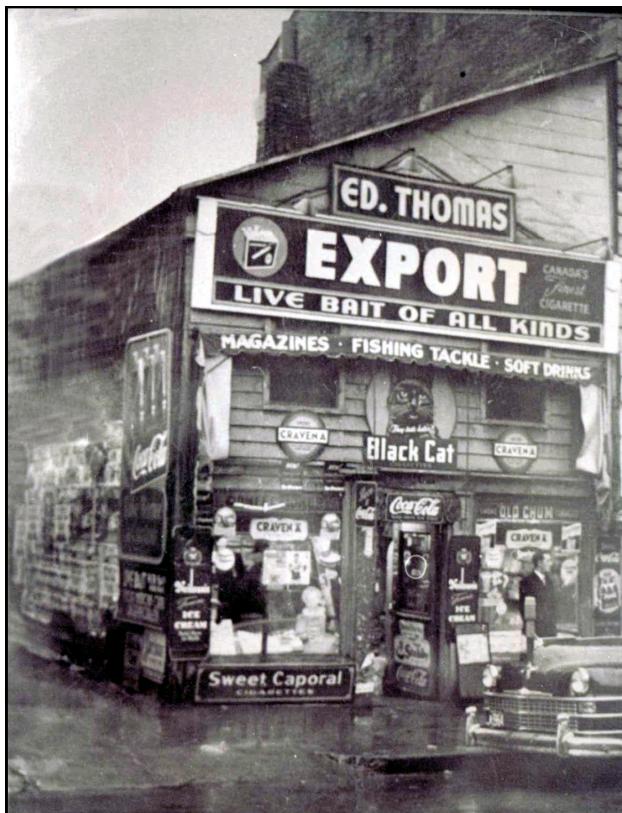
Although he supplied every conceivable tobacco vice, Ed never allowed the demon rum in his establishment. If you wanted to smoke or gamble at Ed’s emporium, you did so sober. This was a wise policy as drinking gamblers were prone to lose more money, get into brawls, and attract the unwanted attention of wives and mothers or, almost as bad, the courts and police.

Ed further cemented his relationship with the city fathers by his enthusiastic participation in sailing, ice-boating, baseball and hockey. In his more mature years, he turned to coaching and also sponsored several sports teams. The local paper devoted almost a quarter of a page to his obituary, noting that in those years, “he was the best known sportsman in this part of Ontario. His name was a byword in hockey circles for many years from Cornwall to Oshawa. He developed many players and brought to Belleville one of its few Ontario hockey championships. He was the coach, manager, and above all a friend to such great hockey names as the late Bill Green ... Frank Goyer, Gillie Goyer ... many others knew Ed Thomas and loved him through their associations.”

The energetic Scots-Canadian was also active in service clubs and was a life member in the Eureka Lodge A.F. and A.M. No. 283 and Moira Chapter No. 7 R.A.M. He was also an ardent fisherman as attested by the many stuffed trophies in the Thomas emporium.

In a conversation with the late police chief Doug Crosby, I was told that in 1968, when Doug first arrived in Belleville, he was driven by the Belleville Club and told, "forget City Hall, this is where the real decisions are made in Belleville." That hasn't been the case for some time, but it likely was in the days of Ed and Don Thomas.

Today, our governments have moved into gambling. Even in Ed's time, a sizeable percentage of the population likely did not regard gambling as a dangerous vice. Considering their options, the police and city fathers probably thought that, given Ed's otherwise sterling character, it was better to have him running a gambling operation than close him down and have far less salubrious characters moving in and operating ones which would cause more trouble for the city. Besides, Ed was a great supporter of the community and well liked.



**The Ed Thomas Cigar and Gambling emporium, circa 1950's.** Photo: Bill Hunt

Don McInroy worked for both Ed and later his son, Don. He told me that both father and son were quick to inform the police if they heard any of their customers planning anything illegal. They also kept them informed of any suspicious characters that came into their cigar store or gambling emporium from out of town.

Like his father, Don Thomas neither smoked nor drank. He did have one weakness, but we will leave that for another issue of *Outlook*.

*With files from The Intelligencer and interviews with Doug Crosby and Don McInroy*

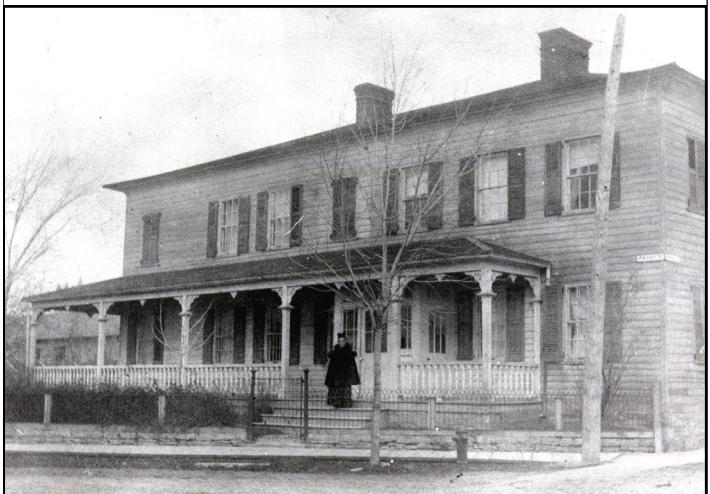


## The Wallbridge House

(No. 1 in an occasional series of  
Belleville's Lost Heritage Buildings)

By Lindi Pierce

In 1973, Belleville lost one of its most important early buildings. But only the historians shed a tear, for the old Wallbridge house stood in the way of progress. It was an "eyesore" and a "firetrap" and it had been purchased by an out-of-town developer, to be replaced by a shiny new gas bar. And that's the way it was in booming 1960s and 1970s Ontario.



**Wallbridge House once sat on the corner of Front Street and Dundas Street. Cooney Howard Auto Sales Incorporated now resides on this corner.**

The history of the Wallbridge house is interwoven with the stories of two pioneering families and the early days of the settlement which became Belleville. The tale be-

gins with the small log structure called Simpson's Tavern on the banks of the Moira, and its innkeepers, James and Margaret Simpson.

Few stories have survived of the courageous and resourceful women who settled Upper Canada. Margaret Simpson is a remarkable example. Margaret was one of the rare individuals who could read and write in the day, and the first woman to be granted a tavern license in what was then Midland District. Emigrating from Scotland in 1791 as Margaret Russell, she was widowed almost upon her arrival in Upper Canada; she married James Simpson in 1793. In 1797, the couple ventured to the tiny settlement of Meyers' Creek at the mouth of the Moira River, where they built a log house and tavern at what would later become the southeast corner of the intersection of Dundas and Front Streets in downtown Belleville.



**Simpson's Tavern is now occupied by Stormy's Car Sales and The Beer Store.**

In spite of many petitions over the years, the Simpsons did not own their property but leased it from the Mississauga people who retained 400 acres at the mouth of the Moira, when they ceded the rest of their lands in 1783. Only years later, in 1816, did Margaret finally gain title to the newly surveyed town lots 15 and 16.

Despite the tavern's rustic appointments—stories are told of a dirt-floored room with a barrel of intoxicating home brew presided over by James Simpson in the centre of the fray—the building became a hub in the fledgling community. Political rallies and township meetings, military recruitment and courts martial, meetings of the Masonic Lodge, as well as social gatherings, all took place in the humble structure. During the War of 1812, the local militia trained on Wallbridge Common

just to the east. In 1816, the tavern was the scene of the meeting which selected the new city's name.

By 1802, Margaret had found herself yet again a widow. Undeterred, she continued running the tavern for another twenty years, raising six children, including sons John and George, and daughter Jane who married pioneer John Taylor, and operating a potashery.

About 1820, Mrs. Simpson sold her tavern and property to her son George, and engaged Asa Yeomans to build an impressive frame inn on the northeast corner of the intersection, on the site of her former stables. Local historian Roger Greig noted that some of the massive unpeeled logs in the frame were likely recycled from the stable building into the inn structure. Square handmade nails, insulating brick infill and massive planks attesting to the area's mighty virgin timber were all revealed during demolition 153 years later.

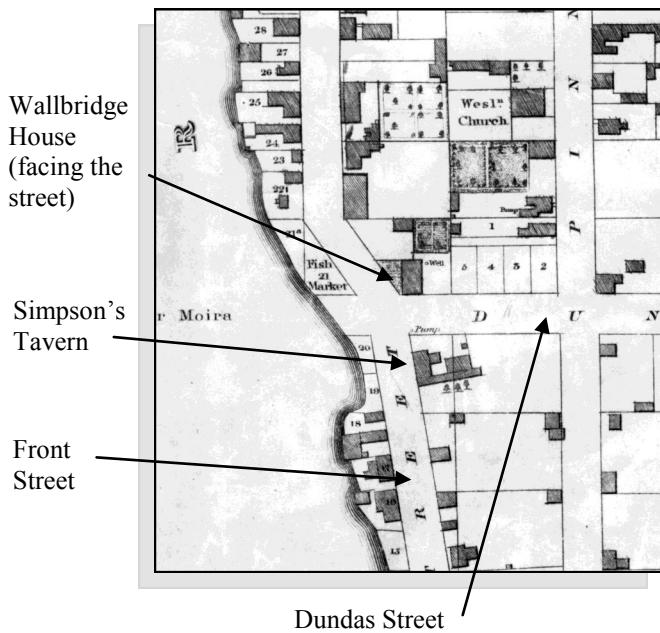
The Canniff papers express the town's enthusiasm for the future of the fine new inn at its strategic location: "it was expected that here would be the centre of town. They tried to get a bridge across there." The fine large house was built in the formal 7-bay symmetrical Loyalist Georgian style, with a shallow hip roof and substantial chimneys.

In 1825, Margaret Simpson sold the inn to lumber merchant William H. Wallbridge and his wife, Mary Everett, for a residence which became known as the White House. Asa Yeomans was engaged to add the long verandah and storm porch, and likely the refinements which were later noted: moulded trims, stained glass transom, fireplaces, elegant wallpaper, and wide doorcase with delicate detailing in sidelights and fanlight. The house later became home to William's son the Honourable Lewis Wallbridge, speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the United Canadas just prior to 1867.

By the early years of the twentieth century, the building's fortunes were changing. Around 1930, Keith Onderdonk and Earl Weese opened Belleville's first Canadian Tire store on the main floor of the old frame hotel. Selling mainly tires and automotive products, it would not have borne much resemblance to today's Canadian Tire superstores! Later used as a tenement house and then abandoned, the former inn's fate was sealed. By the 1970s, damaged by fire, windows boarded over, the 1973 demolition of the once fine Wallbridge House was inevitable.

But its story endures, along with a frustrating misconception. A photo of the Wallbridge house was once identified as Mrs. Simpson's tavern in a local publication, and the error has endured for years—much to the annoyance of Lois Foster, veteran building researcher with the Hastings County Historical Society and Community Archives, and great-great-great granddaughter of Mrs. Margaret Simpson. Perhaps our readers can help dispel the myth?

*(Sincere thanks to Lois Foster for the use of her extensive research notes)*



**1854 Map shows the location of Wallbridge House and Simpson's Tavern** Source: F440 Haslett's Plan of Belleville in 1845 from HCHS Map Collection—Community Archives of Belleville & Hastings County

## QUINTE BRANCH Ontario Genealogical Society Monthly meeting

Proudly presents  
**PETER C. NEWMAN**  
Mr. Newman's topic will be  
*Tracking The Loyalists*  
The presentation takes place at 1 p.m.,  
Saturday, March 16, 2013, at the  
Quinte West Public Library

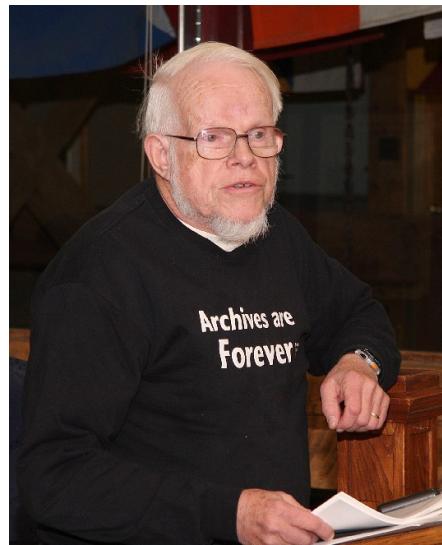
# Celebrating Heritage Week in Belleville

*Story - Collaborative Effort by Attendees*

The Historical Society has had a long association with Heritage Belleville and its predecessor, the Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee LACAC). We maintain a strong interest in the preservation of Belleville's historical buildings, as evident in the large contingent of our members present at Heritage Belleville's annual open house at the City Hall council chambers on Tuesday, February 21, in celebration of Heritage Week.

Mayor Neil Ellis presented the best wishes of Council and remarked on the full house of attendees. Councillor Garnet Thompson also attended.

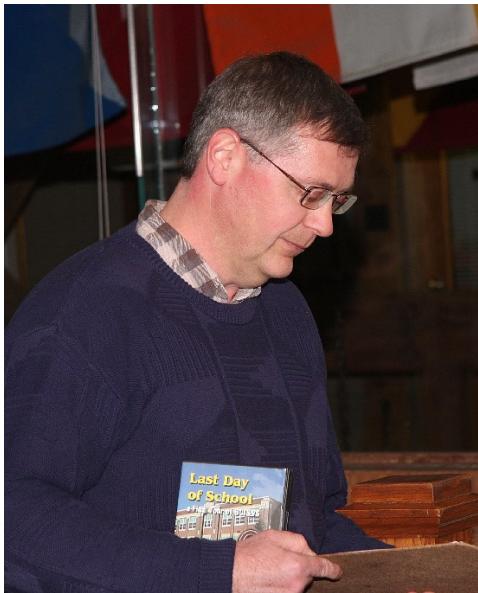
The new posters on the history of the Hotel Quinte produced jointly by the Society and the Community Archives were on display, as well as building research material by Lois Foster. Two of the speakers were well-known members of the society, local author and historian Gerry Boyce and filmmaker Doug Knutson.



**Gerry Boyce**

After a few words from Heritage Belleville Committee Chair Stanley Jones and Vice-Chair Jeremy Davis, and a presentation about Belleville's heritage buildings by Janna Munkittrick-Colton, Gerry Boyce distributed photo souvenirs and spoke on seven interesting buildings that Belleville has "lost."

The buildings were: the original Albert College located on College Street dating from 1857, built by the local Episcopal Methodists as a training centre for Methodist ministers; the Congregational Church on Hotel Street (now Victoria Avenue) ca. 1855, which became the Reformed Episcopal Church and then the Moose Hall before demolition; the Intell/Cablevue Building (remembered by many people in the audience), demolished in 1990; the schoolhouse south of Market Square in the 1850s; Belleville Grammar School on the BCI site ca. 1860; the Hastings County Museum, located in the former Hastings County Land Registry Office and demolished after Glanmore opened in 1973; and the Point Anne cement works, which were featured in a tour in 1987.



**Doug Knutson**

Doug Knutson showed excerpts from a movie that he had made with John Lowry about BCI (Belleville Collegiate Institute and Vocational School), built 1927–1928 on land that had been set aside for the purpose of public education in the town's original plot survey of 1816.

Doug described the history of the film in a moving introduction: *John had the idea of making a movie before the school was closed, as demolition seemed imminent. So we shot it on June 17, 1997—the last day it was officially a school. The narrator, Eugene Lang, was incredible—he was there on the opening day and the closing day and knew everything that had happened in between! He also knew every inch of the school. Despite him being in his eighties, we could hardly keep up with him!*

*That day was also a spur-of-the-moment open house—lots of people were roaming through the building. The overall feeling was, “We can't let this go without a fight.” I think that was the day the grassroots organization to save the building took root. We offered our video for the purposes of raising funds for the proposed Quinte Cultural Centre—but funny thing was it didn't really interest anyone. When 2003 came up and I edited the video for the 75th anniversary (the year before the building was finally demolished) it was a big hit!*

The video is now an invaluable historical record of what we have lost.



**Members of the Heritage Belleville Committee - Colin Rushlow, Vern Whalen, Janna Munkittrick-Colton, Michael Rush, Greg Pinchin (Staff Liaison), Stanley Jones, Robert Johnston and Jeremy Davis.**

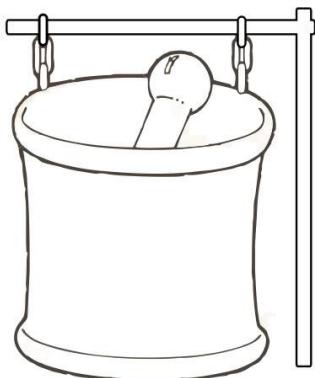
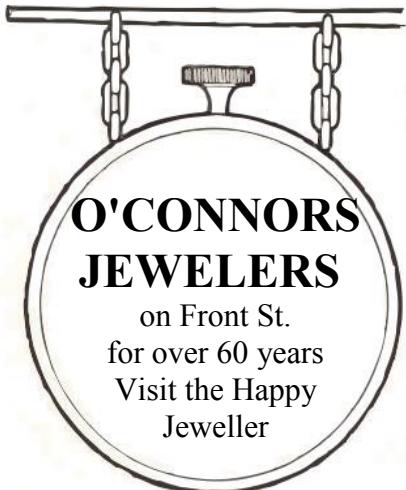
*Photos by Nick White*

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**Senior's Fair at Quinte Sports and Wellness Centre**  
Come visit us at the HCHS booth on Thursday, March 28, 2013  
from 11:00am to 4 pm at the fair. The archive angels will be on  
hand to answer any questions about the displays.

## Bus Tour Tickets Sold Out!

### TRAVEL BACK TO GHOST TOWNS/ PIONEER VILLAGES

By Mary-Lynne Morgan

Hastings County Historical Society is pleased to see the tickets for both bus tours for *Ghost Towns & Pioneer Villages in Our Backyard* have been sold out for Saturday, May 4 and June 1. There is no cancellation list set up. A third bus tour will not be set up in 2013. Bill Hunt has indicated he will be setting up a similar bus tour *Ghost Towns & Pioneer Villages in Our Backyard—Part 2* in the spring of 2014.

Resident historical sleuth C.W. (Bill) Hunt, and other colourful commentators, will take you on a guided tour back to the pioneer villages and ghost towns of Hastings County.

As Hunt wryly points out, "Many of us drive by these places and don't really see them, don't realize there was once a booming dance hall in that building or that an infamous rumrunner lived in the house on the corner." Hunt knows the places and the stories and will be recounting them to those taking this tour.

The tour gets underway in a luxury Franklin touring coach, leaving from the parking lot at the north end of the Bayview Mall at 8:30 AM. There will be stops at Point Anne, Shannonville, Lonsdale, Melrose, Read, Duff Corners, Sulphide and Thomasburg. If time allows, more ghost towns will be visited.

Hunt, a former history teacher, has a particular interest in why different parts of Hastings County were settled at certain times and others much later. He will explain why some communities have faded away, and why it was Scots who settled one area while Irish Catholics settled another.

Among the places to be visited are the oldest house in the county—condemned but still standing—plus abandoned buildings including churches, Orange Halls, schools, general stores, a few bootlegging emporiums and rumrunners' hangouts.

Half-hour pit stops will be made in both the morning and afternoon. A bountiful lunch will be served by the Women's Auxiliary of the Melrose United Church. Aside from soup, sandwiches, fruit, tea and coffee, there will be lots of homemade desserts.

This will be an interesting day while you discover the ghost towns and pioneer villages in our own backyard.



Postcard of Tweed Mills & Moira River HC00677

## Reminder! Renew your HCHS Membership!

Your renewal fees were due in January. Please give your renewal fee to Elizabeth Mitchell at the next HCHS presentation or mail your renewal to the office at Hasting County Historical Society, 154 Cannifton Rd. North, General Delivery, Cannifton, ON KOK 1K0



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### *Hastings County Historical Society Presentation*

#### **Special Guest Speaker:**

**Mary Thomas,**

a historical author, journalist and broadcaster will be sharing details from her popular book *Canadians with Custer*

**Topic:** Hear dramatic tales of the seventeen Canadians involved with Lieutenant-Colonel George Armstrong Custer during his last stand at the battle of Little Bighorn River, in 1876.

**Date:** Tuesday, March 19, 2013

Time: 7:30 p m

**Location:** Quinte Living Centre Auditorium  
(North Corner Door)  
370 Front Street, Belleville

**Bring a friend!**

**Contact Person:** president@hastingshistory.ca  
**Website:** [www.hastingshistory.ca](http://www.hastingshistory.ca)

**Member Designation**