



Huron County Historical Society

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www.HuronCountyHistoricalSociety.ca

Newsletter April 2022

Executive for 2020-2021

Vacant	President	519-440-6206	Ralph Laviolette	Secretary-treasurer
Vicky Culbert	Past- president		Mac Campbell	Director
Elaine Snell	Membership	519-523-9531	James White	Director
Mary Gregg	Director	519-524-9372	Susan Glousher	Director
Rhea Hamilton- Seeger	Director	519-612-1201	Larry Mohring	Director
			Liz Sangster	Director

May Bus Trip

Trek to Bruce and Grey Our Neighbours to the North

May 14, 2022

Prebook tour with David Armstrong 519-524-1156

davidarmstrong@hurontel.on.ca

DEADLINE - May 1, 2022

It has been awhile since we planned our popular bus excursion. The time has come and we are striking out to visit Bruce and Grey. Hard to believe we started planning this two years ago. But thanks to David Armstrong for continuing to hang in there and reconfirm our destination points were still available as well as reaching out to some local historians to talk about the sites along the way. Not a dull moment!

Still a good deal at \$85, which includes lunch and we have a student rate of \$65. Here is the agenda to help you decide!

Early start - Pickup 8 a.m. at Huron County Museum, North St., Goderich with presentations enroute of Sheppardton, Air Training Base, Bruce County History and Settlement

Tour Bruce County Museum, Cultural Centre and Archives, Southampton. Refreshments from Offshore Bakery, Southampton (yummy stuff)

Lunch included at historic Walker House, Southampton

Presentation Grey County History and Settlement, Tour of Grey Roots Museum and Archives, near Owen Sound

Tour of Moreston Heritage Village, next to Grey Roots

Return Goderich approx. 6 p.m.

- Face Masks Required -

From the Editor

Despite winter trying to hang on longer than we like, spring is creeping in. We are delighted to be able to proceed with our bus excursion to Bruce and Grey. Contact David to save your spot.

We have been watching the progress of the Two Mills in Gorrie and Brussels. A special edition of the Notes has been dedicated to these last sites of early power that helped establish local communities. These Notes will be released later this year and we will let members know closer to the publication date.

Ongoing work on plaques is challenging as locations are always a concern. We want them to be readily accessible and visible to as many as we can. Keep your eyes open for new ones installed by community groups at St. Columban and Fordwich.

We were gifted a handful of postcards from a reader. It can be a hard to part with treasures, but limited space, or downsizing is always a difficult time to make decisions around what to keep and what to let go of. And where do you take it?

We have some post card collectors that might be interested in these ones.

Enjoy the book review by James White. Another local topic!



This is of Seaforth, 1910, posted by M.C. to Chas. Robertson in Walton. After our presentation this past winter by Dave Pullen on Building with Nature it seemed fitting to show this card with the wonderful maples.

DANCE THROUGH THE DARKNESS: The Untold Story Of The RCAF Streamliners by Andy Sparling

'Dance through the Darkness' is a pictorial history of the RCAF 16-piece swing band which entertained Allied forces and civilians during the Second World War. The author, Andy Sparling, is the son of a tenor saxophone player in the band. He is himself an accomplished musician and author. His book provides us with a lively account of the formation of the band at the Air Force Technical Training School in St. Thomas, its development in Gander, Newfoundland and its hazardous two years in Europe. Eight of the band were from Southwest Ontario: the conductor and lead trumpet, Billy Carter, was from Goderich and Phil Sparling and Jack Perdue (saxophones) had been schoolmates at Clinton Collegiate.

The volunteer musicians were expected to play in a drum and bugle marching band, a Concert Band for Brass and Woodwinds or the Jazz Band which played for regular Saturday night dances in the tech's Recreation Hall. Some men played in all three, some in two. The Streamliners, as they eventually called themselves, consisted of 15 instrumentalists and a singer. They played in the style of the classic American swing bands of the 1930s and '40s yet developed their own distinctive style. They did not play 'off the shelf' arrangements of the familiar tunes but had their own gifted arranger, Pat Riccio, from Toronto. A critic rated them as "one of the greatest big bands ever produced in Canada."

The Streamliners spent 1941 to 1943 honing their skills in St. Thomas before being sent to the biggest airport in the world at the time: Gander, Newfoundland - the shortest crossing across the Atlantic to Europe. As at the Tech the band were full time musicians and spent hours practicing and playing gigs on and off the base. One thinks of the tourist lost in New York who asked a passer-by how to get to Carnegie Hall: "practice, practice, practice," came the classic reply. So with the band. They became a slick outfit by the time they sailed to Liverpool in convoy on the Empress of Scotland in August 1944.

After most of the boys had recovered from seasickness, they played concerts on deck when weather and U-boats cooperated. Arriving unscathed in Liverpool after the one week crossing from New York they were plunged into a whirl of activity, including a 'buzz bomb' (V1 missile) alert on arrival in London. Phil Sparling, writing a memoir years later, described England as "that incredibly small country inhabited by incredibly big-hearted people." The Canadians were billeted in and around London's West End theatre district. No time for plays or musicals; their lives were filled with practices, dances, concerts, and recordings.

In their first stretch in the UK, the band gave 108 performances in 107 days! They travelled all over England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, at times involving seven-hour return rail journeys or Dakota flights between gigs. Not to speak of delays caused by enemy air attacks. One player had a narrow escape on a rare night off in London. He planned to hear a singer at a pub down a street to the right at a crossroads; instead, he turned left. The pub was demolished that night with the rest of the adjoining block by a V2 missile.

The Streamliners made two tours of Europe before going back to England and heading home. The first was before VE Day. They gave thirty-nine concerts in one month, traveling around the Netherlands, Belgium and France. They were playing to Canadian troops on the front line at Nijmegen when the Germans bombarded the bridge featured in the movie: "A Bridge

Too Far" but escaped injury. However their playing on the front lines did sometimes sound shaky! Their second European tour after the surrender started in a bombed-out Germany and included concerts there and in the three countries they had visited the year before. What they saw in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp horrified them: heaps of emaciated dead bodies, piles of children's, clothes and the overall stench. Andy Sparling's book includes chilling photographs taken by some of the band members.

During their three stints in Britain the boys played with some notable celebrities: Vera Lynn and Anna Neagle both sang with the band; instrumentalists Stephane Grappelli and Nat Gonella joined them on gigs. Glenn Miller, whose band was on the same bill one night, said "they are the best band in Europe - next to mine!"

In all, the Streamliners played over 400 gigs during their seventeen months in Europe. The band was only together for six years (from 1941 to 1946). They departed from England early in 1946 with some intentions of regrouping in Canada. They never did. Some stayed in England where they had successful musical careers: bassist Jack Fallon and reedman Bob Burns were hired to play on recordings by the Beatles. Others had success as professionals back home in Canada.

I found this book an engaging read about 16 forgotten heroes of World War Two. Andy Sparling took the trouble to find and interview surviving members of the band, getting their stories and photographs to assemble his ground-breaking volume. Additionally, he has discovered recordings (available on You Tube), which substantiate the claim that this was one of the best bands ever produced in Canada.

Membership renewal....

If you received this newsletter by mail, the date shown above your name on the address label is the year to which your membership is paid up, according to our records. Call Elaine Snell if you are not sure or need clarification. If you are in arrears, consider this a reminder that the membership fees are \$20. To reserve your member's hard copy of Historical Notes, keep your dues up to date. **Email us about using e-transfer.** Copies of recent past Historical Notes are available from Elaine Snell at 519-523-9531 (past copies are \$8 to \$10 per copy). *To access the **members-only** section for the Historical Notes or to do a search for names or places in the Historical Notes, go to www.HuronCountyHistoricalSociety.ca, open the dropdown menu for Publications, click HCHS Members Login. If you cannot get access using the password, then check if your web browser is up to date.*

If the password is lost or not available readily, contact hchs1965@gmail.com or call 519-440-6206

Where to get your local History Books

And back copies of The Historical Notes – Fincher's and The Book Peddler both of Goderich, North Huron Citizen in Blyth, The Book Barn off Hwy 86 between Wingham and Whitechurch, The Village Bookshop, Bayfield and Bayfield Archives.

Need a simple elegant gift?

For a special gift or simply a thoughtful card to send consider using cards featuring some of the iconic artwork of Jack McLaren. Call executive member Mary Gregg 519-524-9372 or check out Fincher's, and The Book Peddler in Goderich.