



Huron County Historical Society

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Executive for 2019-2020

Vicky Culbert	President	226-421-2295	Ralph Laviolette	Secretary-treasurer
Rhea Hamilton-Seeger	Past- president	519-529-7238	Mac Campbell	Director
Elaine Snell	Membership	519-523-9531	Larry Mohring	Director
Mary Gregg	Director		James White	Director
			Susan Gloucher	Director

Reflections: The Life and Works Of J.W. (Jack) McLaren

October 8, 2020 to April 30, 2021

Wow what a display of work! Do set some time aside to enjoy this colourful exhibit. From Mirth and Mud at Ypres Salient and Vimy Ridge to the vibrancy of landscapes from Huron County and the Maitland Valley, the exhibit explores McLaren's prolific career as an artist, illustrator, and performer. Reflections is presented in partnership with the [Huron County Historical Society](http://www.HuronCountyHistoricalSociety.ca) and features close to 100 works on loan from the community.

At this time, the Museum is open to the public Thursday to Sunday, 1-4:30 p.m. To pre-arrange your visit, please call 519-524-2686 and be sure to review the latest guidelines for visiting the Museum on their [website](http://www.huroncountymuseum.ca).

Reflections is included with regular admission or FREE for Museum Members and Huron County Library cardholders. Please call the Museum at 519-524-2686 to pre-arrange your visit today!

Inside this newsletter

Jack McLaren was a valuable member of the Huron County Historical Society and a 'Tribute' was published in the 1988 Historical Notes. We are reproducing it here for you.

James Harrison White takes a new look at Sandra Orr's book Grand Bend to Southampton. Read on.

Where to get your local History Books

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

November 2020 Newsletter

Lots to do this winter...

We all have those best laid plans that sometimes go awry. That has been my fall. I pull this newsletter together and the HCHSA executive has talked about it going out to members on alternate months. But my husband and I sold our farm and moved to Goderich, leaving schedules and deadlines for volunteer work slipping away from us. Packing up 47 years of history on our farm was emotional. Over the years we attended auctions for furniture and later for treasures. Downsizing a grandparent and several parents also saw additions of furniture, dishes, photos, and books settle into our home.

I believe we are historians at heart. Every item we picked up has a story; the wee wooden ladle my grand mother would take on her hunting trips to Elk Lake; the painted tin plates my great grandmother loved, or the photos, oh the photos, of arriving in Canada, of our ancestors and then our children and now our grandchildren.

Downsizing is not a simple task. It seemed every piece of paper, every folder, every item had a reason to be with us. So we made some hard decisions, sold a lot of things, gave up stacks of magazines to the recycle bin, purged years of files and finally let go of items that we really had not appreciated enough to keep.

Which brings me to you. When it comes to your turn to do the same critical analysis of your 'stuff' please think carefully where things go. Yes recycling is easy but some photos may be better off in the local archives. Check with your Museum to see if there is anything they are missing in their collection that you could help with. Always check first before arriving with an armload!

Furniture is always a big issue. If you cannot sell an item consider donating sturdy pieces to your local charities to sell.

We donated boxes of fabric to local groups who sew for a variety of projects, yes including masks. But we are back on track busy with newsletters, research and planning 2021 Notes, a continuation of the Photographers of Huron. Please don't hesitate to contact any of us, numbers above, to talk about ideas for the future of the Society.

HURON: Grand Bend to Southampton by Sandra Orr.

AN OLDIE BUT GOLDIE

This compact coffee-table volume was published by the Boston Mills Press in 1993 but do not be fooled by its age. It provides a splendid introduction to the features and the development of the coastal communities along the eastern shoreline of Lake Huron. Cottage and homeowners, day-trippers and visitors will revel in the clear photographs and succinct history of this attractive part of South-Western Ontario. Nowhere else have I seen illustrations of this caliber. The front and the back of the dust cover have large photographs; on the front is an 1895 view of a group of four adults and two small children walking out along the dock in Kincardine to the original wooden lighthouse. On the back a view of Southampton harbour with sailboat masts in the foreground and a row of steamer funnels behind them dated 1900. The title page is a double spread of bathers on the populated Grand Bend beach in 1930. Bathing suits, of course, are of the period! Each chapter opens with a vivid full-page photograph relating to the contents. Less successful are the two monochrome reproductions of paintings; one misses their true colour.

The book opens with a history of the area from its pre-historic origins, its first aboriginal inhabitants to the first white settlements begun by the Canada Company in the 1820's. Evidence of the early origins can still be discovered on Huron beaches; Devonian-era fossils lie amongst the pebbles. The first charts of the coastline were produced from soundings made by surveyors under Henry Bayfield from 1815 on. Clearing began in earnest with the founding of Goderich in 1837 by the eccentric Dr William "Tiger" Dunlop and his sober Scots partner, John Galt, fresh from their founding of Guelph earlier in the year. From a trading post on the Menesetung River (later renamed the Maitland) they established a town with an octagonal plan depicting eight streets radiating from a central courthouse a hundred feet above the original crude buildings on the shore.

Progress and development of all the coastal communities, was slow. Early settlers were discouraged by difficulties in clearing the land and a lack of support and finances from the Canada Company. They failed to provide roads or other promised amenities. Many settlers simply packed up and left. Fishing was arduous with the prevailing westerly winds and sudden storms blowing sailors onto rocky shores. Nonetheless, settlement gradually grew. Plans for Southampton were drawn up in 1851; other communities followed. The lake provided the most efficient way of connecting the fledgling villages; the Canada Company built a steamship to run between the ports on Lakes Huron and Erie in 1832. Sandra Orr sums up the early years as a time of hope and isolation: separation from the major centers like London and Toronto yet, with lake, beaches and good farmland, eventually city folks and their needs would come to the South West.

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. Copies of recent past Historical Notes are available from Elaine Snell at 519-523-9531, or at the Museum (past copies \$8.00 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.

Their complaints about the Canada Company persisted into the 1870's. Grocery stores were few and far between. Some families had to walk miles on poor roads for supplies. Postal services were slow or non-existent and frequent gales isolated whole communities. Sleighs in the winter improved things, as did lake travel in the summer. However, the transport problems diminished with the coming of rail to Goderich in 1853 and to Kincardine and Port Elgin in 1873.

Theft and alcohol were problems in the second half of the 19th Century. The population of Goderich jail increased four-fold between 1853 and 1860; most of the inmates were confined for theft or alcohol related problems. Many could not pay their fines. Taverns and hotels abounded in the towns and on the highways between them. Concerning theft, the author relates a story of one customer in a general store who hid a quantity of butter under his hat. The storeowner held him up against a wall until the melting butter ran down his face! Gottim! Such personal stories of the settlers and the residents of the towns and villages along the coast added to my enjoyment of the author's writing. The bibliography tells us the how and the why of it: Sandra Orr managed to find scrap books, diaries and letters to lend character to her careful history so broadening out the dry facts. She maintained a liveliness over the succeeding chapters, grouping her material as follows: Lighthouses, Harbours, Fishing, Tourism, Changing Lifestyles, The Storm of 1913 and War Years.

The settlers who survived the arduous early years were resourceful and learned to cooperate with one another. They worked together to set up mills for producing timber, grains and flour. Grand Bend became a fishing port and a centre for apple and peach orchards while Bayfield was a mecca for wagon making and allied trades. Goderich and Kincardine prospered from trade because their harbours were dredged deep for larger sail ships and steamers. Boat builders flourished, producing unique designs such as the square stern Huron boat with her two balanced sails, which coped well with the waves, winds and weather of Lake Huron. One of the most famous was the "Helen Macleod" built by Hughie MacLeod, a Bayfield fisherman and boat builder. After she had worn out two engines and twelve sets of sails she was succeeded by "Helen MacLeod 2" built and sailed by Hughie's son, Louie. She survives to this day and is undergoing a refit for the Bayfield Historical Society.

There is so much more to this book. I would urge you to read the detail for yourselves, whether you are a visitor to the Lake Huron coast, a potential resident or someone who has lived here for some time. You will learn so much from Sandra's fine prose and wonderful choice of photographs. She weaves Huron County's history together with the stories of the people who developed it in a way that makes the book hard to put down. A common cliché for reviewers but I make it with sincerity. Read and enjoy!

A Tribute to Jack McLaren

The late Jack McLaren was a man of many talents. Through out his 93 years of longevity, he enjoyed a variety of gifted possessions that very few of us can attain. He was an "artist, a playwright, a soldier, a singer, a businessman, an author, and as a person, one could be grateful to have known him."

John Wilson McLaren was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, August 11, 1895, a son of the late John Wilson McLaren and the former Maggie Robertson. He and his wife Jill had resided in "Springfield", in a picturesque home on the banks of the Maitland River at Benmiller, coming to this place from Toronto 25 years ago.

Jack McLaren was an active writer and broadcaster for C.B.C. Radio doing mysteries, and drama; he also established McLaren and McCall, a creative advertising agency in Toronto in the mid '20's.

As an author, he wrote such works as 'Our Great Ones' and 'Let's All Hate Toronto'. As an artist he produced thousands of paintings during his life; he showed a collection of his paintings at local art shows in Goderich, and at the Blyth Festival's summer theatre at Blyth. His studio was ideally located in his home on the Maitland River, as he had scenery and colourful landscape as far as the eye could see. It seemed a perfect setting to add that final touch to a scenic landscape on a peaceful summer evening, or to relax in an easy chair and listen to the song of the birds in the trees nearby.

Perhaps Jack McLaren received no greater joy than to relate his experiences as a member of "The Dumbells Vaudeville Team" during World War I, an experience in his early days as a member of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry in 1916. A few months prior to going overseas Jack had contacted a bad case of jaundice, and while recuperating at a friend's cottage in 1915 near Valcartier camp (while in training), he confidentially met Professor James Mavor, who was a friend of a great Russian novelist, Tolstoy, and who was a staunch patron of the arts. Jack had been putting in time writing skits, and painting a few sketches while on the sick list; and needless to say felt a great deal of pride when the Professor bought some of his paintings, and also encouraged him to go on writing skits. This meeting was to have a great deal of bearing on World War I army entertainment.

In a 1967 interview with Stephen Franklin of the *Weekend Magazine of the London Free Press*, Jack told the interesting story of his years in connection with the First Great War, and his experiences as an entertainer. It was through his friend Professor Mavor, and his knowledge that Jack possessed abilities as a writer, a painter and an actor, that Major Agar Adamson accepted him into the Battalion

attaching him to the snipers to draw maps, and to organize parties and entertainment for the troops.

By the end of May 1916, with the suitable talent needed, half a dozen men were kept out of the next front line tour to write, rehearse and put on a show when the battalion came out of the line again to rest. The group was to be known as the Princess Pats' Comedy Company. These six fighting men - Stan Morrison, Bill, Cunningham, Percy Ham, Tom Lilley, Fred Fenwick and Jack McLaren comprised the first organized group of soldier entertainers in the World War I Canadian Corps. Battalion Paymaster Capt. H.E. Pembroke joined soon afterwards, and so did stage manager Norman Clarke.

Princess Patricia (the daughter of Governor-General the Duke of Connaught) decided to send some of her Ladies'-in-Waiting dresses and hats for the vaudeville group. They chose a quiet corner of their transport lines for rehearsals, and it was here that the first girls "Beauty Chorus" blossomed in Flanders Fields. They needed wigs to impersonate girls, so were lucky enough to find two chairs that had horse hair for stuffing - this solved the wig problem, as it made ideal black hair.

The Germans broke through Ypres Salient, and the battalion broke up, part going to Belgium. The entertainers had to find somewhere to stage their show in that country, so found an upstairs hall with a small stage. They were not well received in this place, and it was only by their humour that the audience forgot some of their grievances, and the show thawed the air so much that they received a thunderous round of applause especially after the rendition of the "Beauty Chorus". A skit, which caricatured a staff officer also caused a great deal of merriment. The fame of the little troop spread rapidly up and down the Canadian and British fronts. The Brass decided that the show should be put on for the whole seventh Brigade and Corps, and headquarters decided that if the merrymakers wished, they could stay out of the trenches and become permanent players. Their Colonel, R.T. Kelly gave them 24 hours to decide which they wanted to be, fighting men or actors. They decided to be "Soldier of Song."

With a few meager costumes and props they climbed aboard a flatcar and landed at the Somme. It was in Warlay that the Comedy Company did some of their best work. Men who had been wounded in the Somme battles made up the audiences. How those lads enjoyed the show! After some privations and endurance of the mud, they finally arrived at Vimy Ridge. They played at Barlin, Bruay, Ecoivres, and Mount St. Eloi.

The fame of the Comedy Company spread to England, and an engagement to give a Royal Command Performance in

London, had to be cancelled as pressure was mounting at the front, and the troops went back to duty with the battalion. Bill Cunningham and Norman Clarke were wounded, and went down the line never to return. Percy Ham went on a special course, and Stanley Morrison lost a leg at Passchendaele and died of his wounds in Montreal. A second PPCLI Comedy Company was formed. When the Ludendorff drive was on in 1918 the Company was invited to give a command performance in the Apollo Theatre in London. The group was fitted with new uniforms, and were coached endlessly as to correct behaviour. On the great night the performers were enthusiastically received by the audience. The final number on the program was a scene in Hell, as Old Nick on his throne waited to greet various repulsive army characters -the sergeant major, the paymaster, the sanitary man as they came hurtling down a chute. Last to arrive was Kaiser Bill. Old Nick immediately abdicated his throne to the Kaiser declaring that he was an amateur compared to him. When the curtain line came at the end of the show the curtain did not budge. Repeatedly Kaiser Bill echoed a message to the wings to drop the curtain -but to no avail. Stepping off his throne the Kaiser goose-stepped his way to the wings and in a clarion voice that reached to the rafters above shouted: "Come on Doc, drop the bloody curtain." "This final line sent the Royal patrons into convulsions of laughter and was the hit of the show." Mr. McLaren recalled. "Then to our dressing rooms to get into our uniforms, in case the Royalty should wish to see us. But alas, we were still in our bulbous army-issue underwear when the Royal Family walked in on us. The players were nonplussed. They, however, behaved nonchalantly, carrying on with their usual savoir-faire, so what might easily have been embarrassing confusion turned into a loud boffo, when George V, in parting, said to his Mary: 'Come on Doc, let's drop the bloody curtain and go.' "

After a period of 15 months the 3rd Division of the Canadian Corps decided to create a sound entertainment group putting on the same style of show. The insignia of the 3rd Division was a red or black dumbbell, on a French grey divisional patch, signifying "Silence and Strength" since this



was the only division formed on French soil. And the show was called, "The Dumbells".

The Dumbells were strong in female impersonators, but weak in Army comedy sketches, and the reverse was true of the Comedy Company. So they joined ranks, and continued on tours in Canada and the United States. After playing to full houses in the Grand Theatre in Mons to a crowd of 2,000 soldiers they went off for three days rest in Brussels, the most strenuous rest a person could imagine.

As their truck drove into the Grands Place, a crowd of some 500 excited citizens rushed forward and surrounded them. That was all they needed - an audience - and the show went on from the back of a truck. This was to prove the most hilarious time of their lives, as crowds followed them everywhere. They entered a rolling rink, and sailed out an open door onto the streets of Brussels. They went into theatres and interrupted shows and put on an act of their own; took over the policeman's stand in the center of the main intersection and snarled the traffic. They stripped down to their long johns and gave a daring exhibition in the fountains in front of the Bourse. What a ball they had!

A few weeks later they returned to give a special performance for King Albert and his Queen - the first performance staged there by British troops since the night before the Battle of Waterloo. Then they slowly played their way through Flanders and home to Canada.

After a one-night stand at Owen Sound they opened the regular tour in London, Ont. The Company was joined by Ben Allen of the 16th Battalion, Jock Holland of the London Scottish, and Red Newman and Charles McLean who had been with the Y-Emmas entertainment troupe overseas. Right from the start the tours proved very successful and they played in Britain, Canada, and the United States, until they were climaxed in 1921 by a successful run on Broadway.

The late Jack McLaren was President of the Huron County Historical Society for the years 1967 and 1968. Jack McLaren was responsible for designing the Crest for the Society. The basic idea for this design was derived from the early pioneer story in winter of 1830 when two men 50 years of age, and their two sons came into Huron County with only the primitive tools to survive in the vast wilderness. They came in carrying salt, flour, an axe, and a fiddle for entertainment, so that they could bring in their families the following Spring.

The Dumbells with Jack McLaren appeared on Broadway in a well-meaning skit of an old dowager entertaining wounded troops in 'The Dutchess Entertains' with some frightful talent.