

MERRITTON MATTERS

SPRING 2019 • Volume 15, Issue 1 • www.merrittonmatters.ca

PHOTO BY SUSAN FLUELLON



Demolition of the St. Catharines General Hospital



CONTENTS INCLUDE:

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MERRITTON MATTERS NEWSLETTER

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has. (Margaret Mead)

A small group of people got together in 2001, calling themselves the Merritton Community Group, with the intentions of enhancing the social and economic character of Merritton while supporting Merritton as a distinctive heritage community. We are now proudly a part of the Merritton Lions.

One of the first projects was this newsletter and since the inception of Merritton Matters, the Editor/Writer has been Lorraine Giroux. All articles without a byline are by her. Phyllis Thomson is editor extraordinaire.

Contributions have been received over the years, with much appreciation, from a variety of local authors. This issue features the work of Isabel Bachmann, Tom Barwell, Pastor Rev. Dr. Gordon Crossfield, Mike Gander, Brian Tibbs and Phyllis Thomson. This newsletter couldn't exist without Tom Barwell who has contributed to every issue since the early 2000's. Tony Morra is relentless in his sourcing of advertising. Photographs are the very professional work of Susan Fluellon. Lana Pesant is our Graphic Designer who takes the draft sent to her by the editor and makes a perfect finished product. Our coordinator, idea generator and community muse, is the super resourceful Sheila Morra.

Articles, or suggestions for articles are very welcome and can be sent via email to merrittonmatters1@gmail.com. *Please note the previous Hotmail email address is no longer monitored.*

LADIES AUXILLARY'S BRUNCH AT LEGION

Join the Merritton Legion Branch 138 Ladies Auxillary as they host a series of brunches. The cost will be \$8.00 per person with a menu of eggs, bacon, sausages, pancakes, toast, home fries, tea/coffee, juice. Don't miss the great food, draws and token gifts.

TIME:

9 A.M. TO 1 P.M.

WHERE:

2 CHESTNUT ST.

WHEN:

APRIL 21, EASTER SUNDAY

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TRILLIUM GARDENING AWARD

The Krebs Residence at 38 Hemlock St. was chosen as the Trillium Gardening Award winner for 2018. Congratulations to Chris and Luther Krebs for this recognition of having added to the beauty of our local community.




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Our Cover

In the last issue of Merritton Matters, I wrote about the trials and tribulations of the redevelopment of the St. Catharines General Hospital. Built in 1885, it was officially closed on March 24, 2013 and sat abandoned since then. We had been promised in 2014 that we could look forward to a new residential development by Panoramic Properties Inc. – Butera Group. Queenston Oakdale Limited of Ancaster acquired the building in 2016 and the hospital was going to be torn down for a multi-residential development. All had gone quiet by the last issue of the newsletter.

Subsequently, in December, demolition equipment was brought to the site by Starnino Environmental Recovery Inc. Then there was the long cautious process of



This picture of mid-process demolition comes from the excellent video St. Catharines General Hospital - Demolition - 2019 - Pt2 by DUYNFLICKS published on Feb 15, 2019. Check out Part 1 and 2.



clearing people who were illegally on the premises. One of the issues consistently raised at the Merritton Candidate Debate in October was that demolition of the hospital might cause rats living in the building to move into the neighbourhood. This was an issue when General Motors on Ontario Street was demolished. Councillors Miller and Littleton declared that they would make sure these concerns were passed along to the companies involved.

We join with the Queenston Street neighbourhood in looking forward to watching the further developments on this site.



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Lions Care DOG GUIDES

Save the date! The Pet Valu Walk for Dog Guides will take place on Sunday, May 26, 2019 at Lock 3 Museum, Welland Canal Parkway, St. Catharines. With no registration fee and all of the funds raised given to provide Dog Guides for Canadians with visual, hearing, medical or physical disabilities, it's a way to contribute to a great cause. Don't have a dog? No worries. Everyone can join Merritton Lions Organizing Committee Chair Bob Flynn, along with other Lions including committee members George Hostick, Natasha Peddie, Bill Sowrey, Linda Sowrey and Scott Nesbitt. They are planning a terrific event and have requested sunny weather that day.

Sign in will be at 10:00 a.m. with the walk starting at 11:00 a.m. For more information go to www.walkfordogguides.com/locations/walk.cfm?ID=1836 or email flynns@sympatico.ca.



LIONS EYE CARE

Merritton Lions are supporting Lions Eye Care again with a gift of \$5,000 to the Ophthalmology department of Niagara Health Foundation towards the purchase of a new microscope. The NHF fundraises to help local hospitals in Niagara where the new microscope will be used by ophthalmologists to perform ocular procedures such as surgeries for cataracts, cornea and glaucoma.



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Merritton Ward Election RECAP

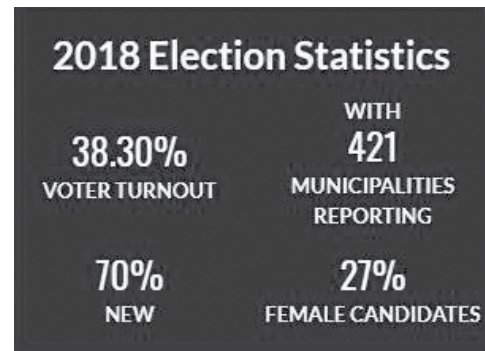
Voters in our community had to choose two City Councillors to represent Merritton Ward from the eight registered candidates in the October 2018 election. A remarkable 62% of our ward candidates were women, much higher than the statistics across the province. Candidates were Kim Clifford, Diane Foster, David Haywood, Hayden Lawrence, Marta Liddiard, Lori Littleton, Greg Miller and Lesley Seaborne.

All candidates (except Diane Foster who withdrew and Hayden Lawrence) presented themselves at the debate held at the Community Centre on Tuesday, October 2. It was a great opportunity for residents to hear directly from this ward's candidates who provided information about how they will impact the people, businesses and community of Merritton and St. Catharines as a whole, if elected.

CANDIDATES WERE ASKED ABOUT TOPICS SUCH AS THE:

- most pressing issues in Merritton Ward and St. Catharines
- future use of the St. Catharines General Hospital site
- improvements of Mountain Locks Park as it encompasses much of the Welland Canal history in Merritton
- under-utilized community park on Seymour Ave. with softball interest dwindling and tennis courts rarely used
- significant traffic delays on Glendale Avenue that will worsen with the addition of WalMart at the Pen Centre
- connecting Chestnut E. and Chestnut W. to alleviate Glendale Avenue traffic
- a new bridge for Moffatt Street area residents to alleviate emergency exit concerns with new developments in the area
- issues that remain at Centennial Park despite the attempts at clean-up and improvement

Thank you to those who took up the challenge of being a candidate in the municipal election. Total votes cast were 8,634. On Election Day 6,356 votes were cast at Merritton Community Centre, Burleigh Hill Public School and Jeanne Sauvé Public School. The remainder were cast at advance polls throughout the city. Congratulations to our new councillors Greg Miller (1,848 votes) and Lori Littleton (1,527 votes). Incumbent David Haywood was narrowly defeated with 1,380 votes.



Ontario Statistics for 2018 Municipal Election from Ontario Association of Municipalities

CAROUSEL CONTRIBUTION BY LOCAL SCHOOL

Jeanne Sauvé French Immersion Public School is now the site of a space that functions as a workshop for the Friends of the Carousel. The partnership officially began February 21 with Jeanne Sauvé, the former Kernahan Park Secondary School on Bunting Road, providing a space for the Friends group to continue their maintenance and restoration work of the carousel animals and chariots from Lakeside Park. It's a great opportunity for students to see the volunteers in action as they repair and repaint in order to get the carousel pieces ready for the season which begins May 18. The volunteers, who are associated with the City of St. Catharines, meet regularly with restorers meeting on Thursday and Saturday mornings and painters working together on Tuesday mornings.



Spring has sprung at the cheery front entrance of Jeanne Sauvé. Kudos to teacher Danielle Barker.

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From Our Ward Councillors

Hello Merritton,

Thank you to Merritton Matters for this opportunity to update you on what's been going on since the election. We are settling into our new positions and are really enjoying getting to know many of you in the community. We have been pleased to not only hear your concerns, but also take to heart your suggestions for making Merritton an even better place to live than it already is.

By now, no doubt, you have seen the tremendous amount of demolition work that has been done to date at the former Queenston Street hospital site. The demolition is expected to continue until summer and we look forward to hearing about the plans from the developer for the space soon.

We have become very active at Council and sit on numerous committees. Lori is a member of the Budget Standing Committee, Library Board, and the City's Economic Pillar. Greg is a member of the St. Catharines Transit Commission, the Social Sustainability Pillar and the Linking Niagara Transit Committee at the Region.

There are a lot of exciting events occurring in — and opportunities to get involved with — Merritton in the coming months. The Queenston Neighbours hosted an Easter Egg hunt at Connaught School on April 6, at 11 a.m., in conjunction with the school's spring craft fair. As well, take a spin around your neighbourhood with your neighbours on your bike during the Glow Ride on May 24, at 8:30 p.m., beginning at Bike Me Up Niagara. Come out and make your bike (and community!) glow.

Both of us are committed to actively engaging the community in solutions. For this reason, one of our first joint motions at Council was to form a Merritton Arena Working Group in order to resolve some of the outstanding issues at the Merritton Arena. We are working with City Staff and the Merritton Lions to ensure this important community asset is properly maintained, continues to be well run by the Lions and can be enjoyed by all in our community. Also, we are forming a Second Woods Neighbour Association, so please keep an eye out for more information on that in the coming months; or reach out to one of us for more information. Neighbourhood associations are a great way to bring together all the passion and expertise of our communities to craft local solutions, host events, plan the future and have a lot of fun along the way.

Never hesitate to get in touch with either of us. You can reach us at:



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The Iron Rail Bar

By Tom Barwell

At first glance you might think this is a tale about a drinking establishment. Although there is an 'Iron Rail Bar' located in New Milford Connecticut, it does not enter into the picture. This is about an iron rail bar in Merritton.

It is located at the corner of Merritt and Chestnut streets and borders what we used to call Main's Hill. It overlooks a deep depression where for years kids used to gather in the winter and toboggan down its slopes. In the summer, numerous games were played especially football or just simply a game of catch. It was a busy place. To the surprise of a lot of the populace, it was at one time the home of the Merritton Lawn Bowling Club. There is still an old concrete bench build into the bottom of the east wall and for years after they left the wires of the lighting system hung the length of the venue, slowly rotting away.

I am not sure how many lanes there were but it must have been at least three. It was a pretty sight, especially in the evening. The participants dressed in their whites, the green grass background and the peaceful feeling as the bowlers slowly sent the bowls on their way with hopes of making a crucial hit. There were little muted cheers mixed with soft groans as a shot was missed. Periodically play would stop and the players would group together, open their brown bags and nibble on wondrous little sandwiches and drink from small flasks containing somewhat suspicious liquids suggesting it was more than just water or tea.

Early one Saturday evening, there we were, overlooking the panorama below. Even though we did not know a lot about the game, we found ourselves letting out small cheers when we thought a good shot was made and low groans of despair when one was missed. Slowly we found out the basics and actually enjoyed it over time. The players looked up with shy smiles at our cheers and groans and gave us the odd thumbs up.

One evening a whole group gathered below us and invited us down. We laughed and then realized they were serious. So down we went. They were going to give us a chance to play.

We discovered the ball was not round but oval with a weighted side. The little white ball, called a jack, was thrown first and it became the target. The closest ball counted as a point. Opposing players could knock an opponent's ball away to steal a point. The game was similar to curling or the Italian game bocce. Bocce, of course, could become more boisterous and loud where lawn bowls were much more sedate and cool. Although lawn bowling looked easy, it was not and took a great deal of skill.



Merritton Lawn Bowling was even celebrated as a part of our history through street art. Long time MM readers might remember that the Merritton Community Group won a prestigious Community in Bloom contest in 2009 for our Heritage Bins which were painted by secondary school students.

It was a marvelous learning experience. It was a much older crowd and of course being kids we were a little intimidated by them as they represented authority. We were treated with great respect and joined in with the laughter and friendly banter.

One late afternoon we were greeted with darkness and noticed the lawn had not been groomed to smooth perfection. What happened? Glancing over to the area behind the library we noticed overhead lighting. Curious, as we always were, we wandered over and there they were. Unable to keep the Iron Rail area in tip top shape because we took over in the winter months, they had moved to a more suitable area. The players greeted us warmly and again we had a chance to play during the lull in the action. It became a regular spot to go. Who would ever think that a group of little brats like us would be interested in lawn bowling. We even helped clean up after tournaments.

Then a few years later, they moved again. This time beside Merritton High School. The old Toronto Dominion Bank building beside Richardson's grocery was moved over and became the club house. With more courts, it flourished with larger than ever tournaments that became events in the town. Even the high school kids sometimes set up teams and played.

But slowly, through attrition and the younger crowd losing interest, the club finally folded. It was sad to see it go. There are still clubs active in the area but it seems much more serious now and the real fun vanished. But those wonderful people let us play.

Looking over the Iron Rail now it seems impossible that there once was an active lawn bowling club below. We met some dear people over the years it flourished and gained a lot of respect for the older generation existing at that time of our lives.



Moving to the new site of Merritton Lawn Bowling in June 1956. Photo courtesy of St. Catharines Museum, reference number S1956.48.28.1



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ELM ST. UNITED CHURCH CELEBRATES 160 YEARS

By Pastor Rev. Dr. Gordon Crossfield

*Blessed is the [church]
which trusts in the LORD
“For it will be like a tree
planted by the water,
That extends its roots by a stream
And will not fear when the heat comes;
But its leaves will be green,
And it will not be anxious
in a year of drought
Nor cease to yield fruit.”*



Pictures are from a Victorian High Tea held on Saturday, June 23, 2018. Everything from the food to the entertainment was as authentically Victorian as possible, recognizing that Elm Street United Church began serving the Merritton Community during the reign of Victoria. Thanks to Bonnie Bryan for providing us with these pictures!

Psalm 1 originally referred to a person, but it pretty much describes the 160 year history of Elm St. United Church. Even as the stately Elm trees have vanished from the street, the building constructed in 1888 which houses the church, remains. There has been drought. There has been heat. There has been cause for anxiety, but there has always been green productive leaves and a harvest of spiritual fruit because it has been rooted in God's Word.

This church's roots go deep into the Merritton community as well. Over the years, the building has hosted a thrift shop, clothing bank, a Korean congregation as well as so many other groups. Today, we have Scouts, Brownies, Sparks, Girl Guides, A.A., an exercise group, euchre, and a Kenyan congregation as well as our many bazaars, dinners, neighbourhood BBQ's, special worship services and an ongoing Bible Study, an excellent choir and accompanist. We are in our last phase of making the building completely accessible to become even more welcoming.

The church is, of course, actually the people who meet in the building. The congregation generously supports Community Care, Centre 4 Women and an orphanage in Nepal.

During the recent Labour Day Parade, I had a brief conversation with a woman who fondly remembers attending Mclean Malpas United Church which was such an important partner with Elm St. in ministry in this area for 95 years.

The story of all institutions, as well as churches, includes new beginnings, closures and amalgamations. Denominations regroup and restructure and rename. In the United Church, Pastoral Charges are now called Communities of Faith. I like that. It describes our congregation very well. I think of the number of people over the last 160 years who have found a welcoming, healing community with many opportunities to grow in faith and serve God in Merritton.

Our rich history encourages us to look forward to an enriching future. You are welcome to join us.

20TH Anniversary of Merritton High School's Closing

Ten years ago, in the Spring of 2009, Merritton Matters front cover marked the ten-year anniversary of Merritton High School's closing in 1999. The cover featured the staff and last students to attend the school.



Reunion for the Class of 1999

It's been 20 years since the graduation of Merritton's class of 1999. Shannon Facette, with help from Becky McMahon, is organizing an event on Saturday, June 22, 2019 to commemorate the occasion. Although all the details haven't been worked out yet, the tentative plan is to have it from 7 p.m. – 1 a.m. Food and snacks will be there along with a cash bar. Watch for news about the amazing band already lined up!

Pre-ticket sales will be available at a discount compared to tickets at the door. It's open to anyone who attended Merritton 1995-1999 at this point.

Check out their Facebook page at [Class of '99 Reunion!!](#)



TIMELINE OF MERRITTON HIGH

- 1934/1935** – Construction began on the building designed by Lionel Hesson. The school was comprised of six rooms (3 classrooms, 1 laboratory, 1 library and 1 gym). MHS gymnasium was the largest gymnasium in the Niagara Peninsula. In the first year, the school had 99 students and 7 staff members. Official offerings at the school were Grades 9-13 and a 4-year commercial course.
- 1936** – Home Economics and Industrial Arts facilities were added and these were the first in South Western Ontario, aside from Toronto.
- 1949** – A commercial wing with two classrooms was added.
- 1951/1952** – Four classrooms and a cafeteria were added to the south end.
- 1955** – A North Wing was added with two science labs and two more classrooms.
- 1960** – Merritton High School became part of the St. Catharines school system on December 31 due to amalgamation.
- 1964** – New lighting and acoustic ceilings were part of the renovations which included an enlarged office.
- 1967** – A new wing was completed with new commercial facilities, counseling area, double gymnasium and a larger library was put into two expanded classrooms. A new Industrial Arts shop and two new Home Economics areas were added. Now the school could accommodate 750 students.
- 1973** – It became one of the first schools in the Lincoln County to have a two-semester system.
- 1984** – The 50th Anniversary was held and very well attended.
- 1999** – Merritton High School was closed. Merritton's Last Blast, a weekend event marking the closing of the school, was held and widely attended by past and current students.
- 2002** – Pinehurst, a private secondary school, opened with a target population of students who were considered to be not self-motivated.
- 2012** – Canada Prep Football Academy joined Pinehurst and operated in a separate section of the building. (Now called the Canada Prep Academy and advertised as 'Quality Education and Elite Athletic Training', it is now located in Jordan.)
- 2014** – Pinehurst closed. Newspaper articles at the time describe Pinehurst as being financially unsustainable because of low enrollment.
- 2016** – The building became the Royal Imperial Collegiate of Canada, a private high school funded by overseas investors, focused on academics with an emphasis on sports.



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MHS Instruction Shout-Outs

Small but mighty! Various instructional approaches at Merritton High School have been described in published books and magazines. Here are two examples of shout-outs to MHS in the past.

Bruce Hemphill collaborated with Susan Drake and Ron Chappell for an article in 1996 for *The Science Teacher* about using fiction as a catalyst for students as they learned about environmental science through experiments and discussions at Merritton High. The article, entitled *A Novel Approach* opened by describing a group of Grade 9 students who used their learning to teach other students at the school.

The book *Significant Developments in Local School Systems*, written by W.G. Fleming and published in 1972, includes an article about a teaching experiment that took place at Merritton High in the late 1960's. The English program at the high school was highlighted as an innovative approach in education. Merritton was the smallest secondary school in the Lincoln County School Board and that was definitely an advantage as the five English teachers could work closely together. The emphasis for this instructional approach was using a different means of communication, rather than the traditional Shakespeare, poems and grammar textbooks. Another difference was that students taking the four year program and those taking the five year program were not treated differently as far as course content. The goal was for all students to read, write and listen using a variety of forms of communication. Listening and producing radio programs was the focus for the Grade 9 students.

COMMERCIAL COURSES AT MHS

By Phyllis Thomson

Editor's Note: A while ago, I read an obituary for a man who had lived a full life that inspired all who knew him. I didn't know Bob McMahon but I saw that he was a graduate of Merritton High School and read the comment that he was 'the only boy in the Commercial Class'. The comments noted that the skills he learned in that program led to his job at Davis Lumber where he started by typing invoices, then he was promoted to salesman and soon to sales manager. Success continued to follow him into the insurance industry through his hard work and commitment. Intrigued, I asked Phyllis Thomson to tell me more about the commercial program.

Many years ago, Merritton High School and Thorold High School were under the jurisdiction of the Lincoln and Welland High School Board (known as Linwell). Other than the St. Catharines Collegiate, they were the only high schools in the area at that time. If students who lived within the Linwell Board's area opted to take the Commercial course, they had to travel to Merritton High School to do so, and these students came from many different places besides Merritton, i.e., Port Dalhousie, Grantham Township, Thorold, Thorold South, Beaverdams and the occasional student from St. Catharines who had been granted permission to do so. And it was not uncommon to find at least one young man bravely sign up for the course.

This arrangement for Commercial students continued until Grantham High School was built and they established a Commercial Department.

The Commercial course was designed for students who chose not to go into the academic stream. The Commercial Department at Merritton was a busy and well-run department with many memorable teachers over the year. When the students graduated, they left school superbly trained for positions in the business world of secretaries, bank personnel, etc. having mastered the art of Typing, Shorthand and Bookkeeping as well as other important qualifications.

MUSEUM AND WELLAND CANAL CENTRE INTERPRETIVE PLAN

Ever thought about possible changes in the way the Museum organizes and shares materials and cultural history? Then you need to read the enhancements proposed in the St. Catharines Museum and Welland Canals Centre's new interpretive plan. The plan includes various uses of the current space and ways to provide different experiences for visitors. A public engagement session was offered on Friday, March 15 to review the plan and a survey was available until March 18 but the plan is still available to read at <https://www.engagestc.ca/st-catharines-museum-interpretive-plan>. On the website, you can subscribe for project updates. After the consultation stage, contributions will be evaluated and reviewed. The Project team will report back on key outcomes and then the final outcomes will be summarized along with recommendations for future action.

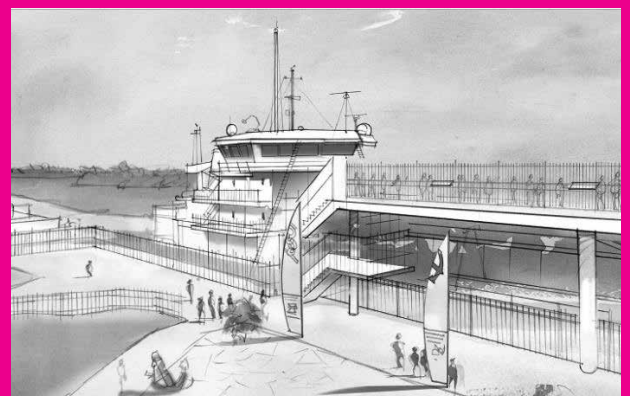


PHOTO CREDIT: CITY OF ST. CATHARINES

The Great Storm of '98

By Isabel Bachmann

One big difference between today's news and the old days is the style of delivery. While modern news comes via acronyms and buzz words, the old newspaper reporters used the opportunity to expand the average into the superlative and insert headlines into the middle of very long sentences! Here is an example that demonstrates the kind of reportage seen at the time of the great storm of September 26, 1898.

In this excerpt, we learn a bit about the buildup and force of the initial strike. In the next installment, we learn about the human toll. The text below is reproduced as it appeared in the St. Catharines Daily Standard of September 29, 1898.

MONDAY'S FATAL STORM AT ST. CATHARINES WHICH LEFT DEATH AND DESTRUCTION IN ITS PATH

It Came with the Force of a Hundred Express Trains Running Abreast – Incidents of the Greatest Storm in the History of the Section.

MERRITTON, Ont., Sept. 29—More furious in velocity and force than a hundred fast express trains running down grade abreast at topmost speed and smashing right across lots into the heart of a town was the sweep of the angry tornado that wiped out a strip of the St. Catharines-Merritton valley Monday afternoon about 3:30 o'clock, killing four people before they had time to realize what had struck them, and leaving 50 or 60 others with crushed skulls, broken ribs, injured spines, fractured limbs and a score other equally as serious injuries. Of these several may yet die as a result of the fearful disaster, and it is certain that a great number will bear upon their bodies for life the painful evidences of their thrilling experience in the first and only cyclone that ever swept the Niagara district.

No pen can depict, no pencil delineate or imagination even conceive the intense horrors of this frightful confusion of elements, with scarcely a moment's warning it came on.

BEFORE PEOPLE COULD THINK TWICE

it snatched several frame buildings from their stone foundations and hurled them wildly against other buildings, small all to heaps of ruin. Structures of brick or stone went down like houses built of cards while their roofs went sailing on across the heavens. Teamsters on the streets were picked up with their wagons and teams and thrown violently against whatever solid came in their way, that is if anything could be said to be solid. Railway cars laden with heavy freight were tossed from the rails like empty barrels and sent splashing into the Welland canal while at the same time one or two canal barges were hoisted out of their element and left high and dry on the banks of the canal. Papers, branches of trees, hats, chickens, parasols, tin signs, brush and dust strewed the remote heavens, while lower in air the number of planks, telephone poles, tree tops, loose boards and pieces of roofs might well have inclined anyone who watched it intently to fancy that the whole town was being swept away. **ALL WAS**

IN A MIGHTY SWIRL

A whole housetop would suddenly dart upward a hundred feet or so to be as quickly hurled in the dust, snatched up and carried on again in the mad race of flying rubbish.

A few moments and it was all over. The tornado was past, but the wreck, ruin, destruction and death it had wrought in a few short moments that seemed almost as a breathing space, remained. Homes, the accumulation of a lifetimes' patient, hopeful toil, were gone. Manufacturing concerns and public buildings, monuments bearing testimony to the enterprise and energy of a progressive people, were smashed and ruined. But it was not of these things that people thought. Beneath those piles of brick and beams pinned in by fallen timbers, with eyes, throat and lungs full of grit and dust, were the poor unfortunates who had gone down in the crash. Some screamed with pain at every move made to extricate them, other moaned faintly as their bruised and mangled forms were carefully lifted. But there were others who neither screamed nor moaned nor suffered from the choking dust. They were rescued from their awful prisons but were beyond all help or need of help. In a hundred homes the light of happiness and joy had given place to sadness and sorrow and instead of peace and tranquility had come trouble and unrest.

To be continued...



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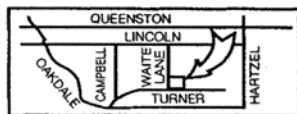
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CLOSED WEDNESDAYS & SUNDAYS

Royal Canadian Legion Turns 90



A celebration was held at the Merritton Branch 138 on Saturday, March 30. We look forward to hearing more about in our next issue!

ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION MERRITTON BRANCH 138 A BRIEF HISTORY

By Mike Gander, Public Relations Officer
Royal Canadian Legion, Merritton Branch 138



After the First World War, Veterans were upset with the way our government was treating the very people who risked life and limb for their country. Veterans tried to advocate for benefits through the government, to no avail. Veterans decided that they were getting nowhere with the many small groups so they decided to amalgamate many of the Veteran's organizations throughout Canada, into one large organization. In 1926, The Canadian Legion of the British Empire Service League, was formed at their first convention in Winnipeg.

In 1928 a group of Merritton Veterans wanted a Branch in their own town. On January 10, 1929, Dominion Command presented The Canadian Legion, Branch 138 their charter and David Cameron was installed as our first President. This took place on the second floor of the Merritton Town Hall. Forward to 1939, the Branch 138 Ladies Auxiliary was formed on November 30th. While our Branch held its meetings in the Merritton Library members were discussing buying a place of their own. They purchased a building at the corner of Chestnut St East and Hastings. After renovations, they moved in in 1940 and have continued to meet there ever since.



In 1948, the Legion decided to double the size of their building and an addition was built along the Chestnut side. This would, not only, increase the size of the Club Room but also double the size of the hall upstairs. This work was all done by members at the time. In 1960, Queen Elizabeth II bestowed the title of Royal ahead of the name Canadian

Legion. We became the Royal Canadian Legion throughout our many Branches. About 1961, a new entrance was built at the Hastings St end. This, again, helped to increase the size of the building. In 2012, Branch 138 became handicap accessible with the installation of a lift device, making the hall and the clubroom accessible to anyone with mobility issues.

For 90 years, now, Merritton Legion has been there, first and foremost, to help and advocate for our Veterans and secondly, helping our community through donations to such places as the Hospital, The Hotel Dieu Shaver, Community Care etc. We will continue in this endeavor for as long as we are here. This is done through the generous donations made during the annual Poppy Campaign and with the help of the countless volunteers that have helped to make our Branch what it is today.

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CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR BANTAM AE TEAM FOR WINNING A SILVER MEDAL IN OMHA 2019

At the corner of this photo, you'll notice a tribute to Jim Liddiard, Head Coach of the Bantam Hockey Team, who sadly passed away on October 31, 2018. Jim was a longtime owner of Pirie Appliances, President of the Merritton Athletic Association, member of the Merritton Lions Club and past member of the Royal Canadian Legion of Merritton. He will be missed by his loving family and friends and will long be remembered for his devotion to the community of Merritton.



176 OAKDALE AVENUE

The YWCA is facilitating a non-profit 24-unit housing complex rising on Oakdale Avenue with four emergency shelter units as well as one-bedroom, two-bedroom and three-bedroom units. This construction is a great example of their goal as an organization to 'provide shelter, food and assistance to women and families in poverty... and work to create a community that supports women in need and provides support through each step towards financial stability and independent living.' Welcome to the neighbourhood!

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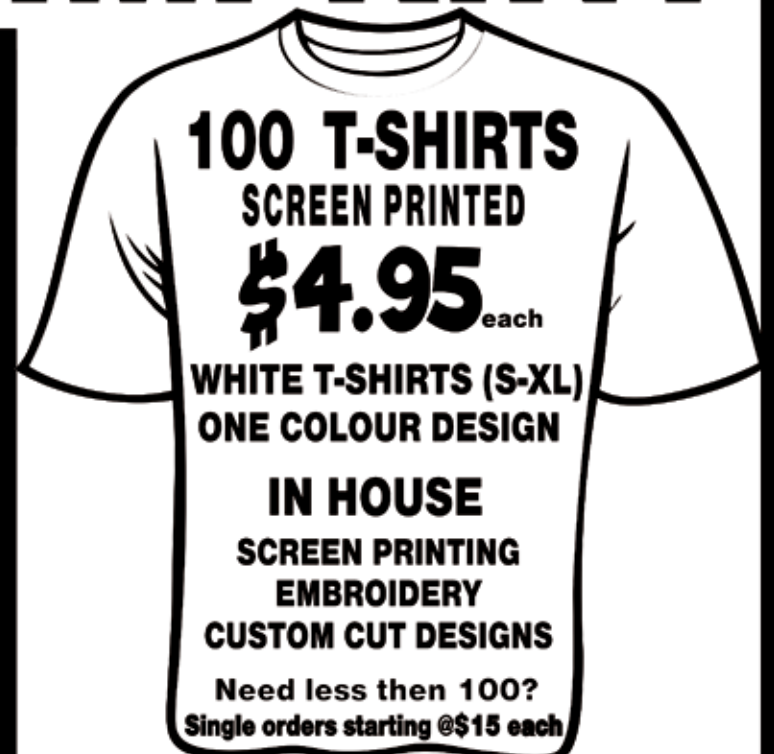
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The History of the Stairs

By Brian Tibbs

How many people, travelling Oakdale Avenue near the west entrance of Clifford's Creek Park, have passed these stairs with nary a glance or thought of why they are there? Many people would ignore it for the stairs end in a tangle of old bramble bush and small trees; really nothing to spark one's interest. Another "relic of the past" you say, but the past is history and history is a story to be told.

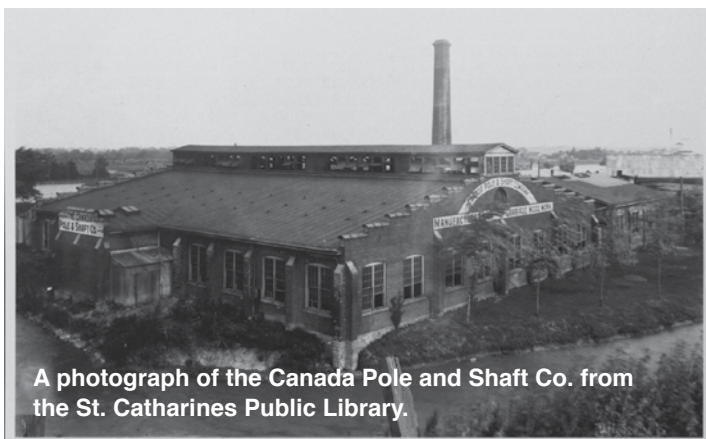
The stairway leading up to 176 Oakdale Avenue was part of the estate of the Phelps family that could trace their history back to the time of William the Conqueror. One of them, William Phelps, left England in 1630 with his wife and five children on the ship 'Mary and John'. Their arrival at Nantucket, on May 30, 1630 coincided with the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock ten years earlier.

Nine generations later, Orson James Phelps was born on Feb. 23, 1820 in Ludlowville, New York. Samuel G. Phelps, his father, made a move to Canada with his family, arriving in St. Catharines on Sept. 18, 1833; shortly after they took up residency in Centreville, now Merritton.

Orson had four brothers - Noah (born in 1828), Philanger, (born in 1832), Judson, (born in 1834) and Elijah (born in 1841). As a young man, Orson obtained employment on the construction of the Second Welland Canal. With his natural talent for civil engineering, he was made a superintendent building the piers and lighthouses at Port Dalhousie, Port Colborne, Point Albino and Burlington. In 1851 Orson James Phelps, along with a partner, started a lumber mill at Lock 8.

Elijah Hollister Phelps became a prominent businessman in the area as owner/operator of the E.H. Phelps & Co. Wheel and Shaft (Spoke) Manufacturing Company which was founded in 1868. It was located at the site of Lock 11 of the Second Welland Canal. In the following years, the name changed to Pioneer Pole & Shaft Co., then Canadian Pole and Shaft Company and then Haynes Wheel Co. The plants were located on the site of the former Hayes Dana Steel plant on Oakdale Avenue.

A community minded man, Elijah sat on Town Council for several years when elected in 1880. Councillor Phelps was instrumental in the proposal of a waterworks system for domestic use and firefighting purposes. He also served as Reeve of Merritton. Elijah and his wife, the former Clare A. Saunders, raised a family of four boys and two daughters. Elijah Hollister Phelps resided at 296 Merritt St. until his passing March 18, 1924.



A photograph of the Canada Pole and Shaft Co. from the St. Catharines Public Library.

Milo Goodrich Phelps (born 1865) was one of four sons and two daughters of Elijah. In his younger days, Milo worked at his uncle Orson's sawmill at Lock 8, then later for his father Elijah at the spoke factory on Oakdale Ave. He married in 1889 and he and Henrietta lived at 176 Oakdale Avenue. Their union produced four children, two girls and two boys. Following in his father's footsteps, Milo also served as a Reeve of the Town of Merritton. Henrietta Phelps passed away Oct. 27, 1951 at the age of 85. Four years later on November 13, 1955 Milo Phelps joined his wife of 62 years.

With the passing of Milo and his wife Henrietta, the family home at 176 Oakdale Ave. became the possession of the eldest child, Roy Cecil Phelps. Roy appears in photos in the St. Catharines Standard from the 1940s and 50s as a handsome, dashing man of adventure, a traveler to exotic places overseas and working as a military doctor in foreign lands.

He is best described by his obituary in The St. Catharines Standard dated January 30, 1976.

"Born in Merritton, Lt. Col. Phelps was educated in Merritton public schools, St. Catharines Collegiate and graduated from the University of Toronto Medical College in 1913. He joined the Grenfell Medical Mission in Newfoundland in 1913 and enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps as a Lieutenant, serving in Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Near East until 1930 when he transferred to the Indian Medical Service. He continued this service holding important medical and civil offices until the invasion by the Japanese into Burma and he stayed in that post until ordered to evacuate.

He reached England and then to Canada, retiring from the army at the close of the war in 1945. He was an adherent of Elm St. United Church and a member of the Canadian Medical Association and a life member of the St. Catharines Golf and Country Club."

The family home that stood on the small knoll overlooking Clifford's Creek and Oakdale Avenue remained empty for a short period before being destroyed by fire of unknown origins. Doctor R.C. Phelps never married.

The stairs that lead to the main entrance of 176 Oakdale Avenue still remain as silent sentinels to a Merritton family's glorious past.



CREDITS: Thanks to Mike Johnson for research, St. Catharines Public Library Special Collections and Archives of The St. Catharines Standard



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The Bradleys (Continued from last issue)

Isabel Bachmann wrote about Olive Bradley in our Summer issue of Merritton Matters. Olive was a Merritton-born girl who became the first in Canada to enter the field of 'Industrial Nursing.' She was born in Merritton in 1880, to Abraham and Jane Bradley, the fourth child of 4 daughters and six sons and graduated from the Toronto General Hospital Training School for Nurses in 1907. After schooling, Olive applied for work at Plymouth Cordage in Welland, a branch office of the main plant built in 1906, where the company supplied rope and, in particular, binder twine for the farmers of the Prairies. Merritton had a number of Bradley families in residence in Olive's younger days.

Isabel mentioned in the article that she would love to hear from anyone related to or otherwise associated with the Abraham and Jane Bradley family. It reminded me of another Bradley mystery. In 2013, a newspaper article featured Adam Bradley, Susan Lott, Francie McGlynn and a framed photo of a young woman in a dark dress. It was a photo of Theresa Bradley, who died Dec. 19, 1903.

Her maiden name was Hogan and she had married into the Bradley family. At the time of the article, Adam, Susan and Francie were seeking more information on Theresa.

Turns out that Adam Bradley has done a lot of research on the Irish Bradley families living in Merritton as his ancestors lived in the Oakdale Avenue and Moffatt Street for many years. One interesting piece of trivia he passed along is that our current Bradley Street is not the original Bradley Street. In the 1881-82 Street Directory for Merritton, Bradley Street was shown as running off Thorold Road, also called St. Catharines Road, which is now Oakdale Avenue. Bradley Street was located south of Phelps Street. By the 1893 Street Directory, Turner Street and Phelps Street are mentioned but not Bradley Street.

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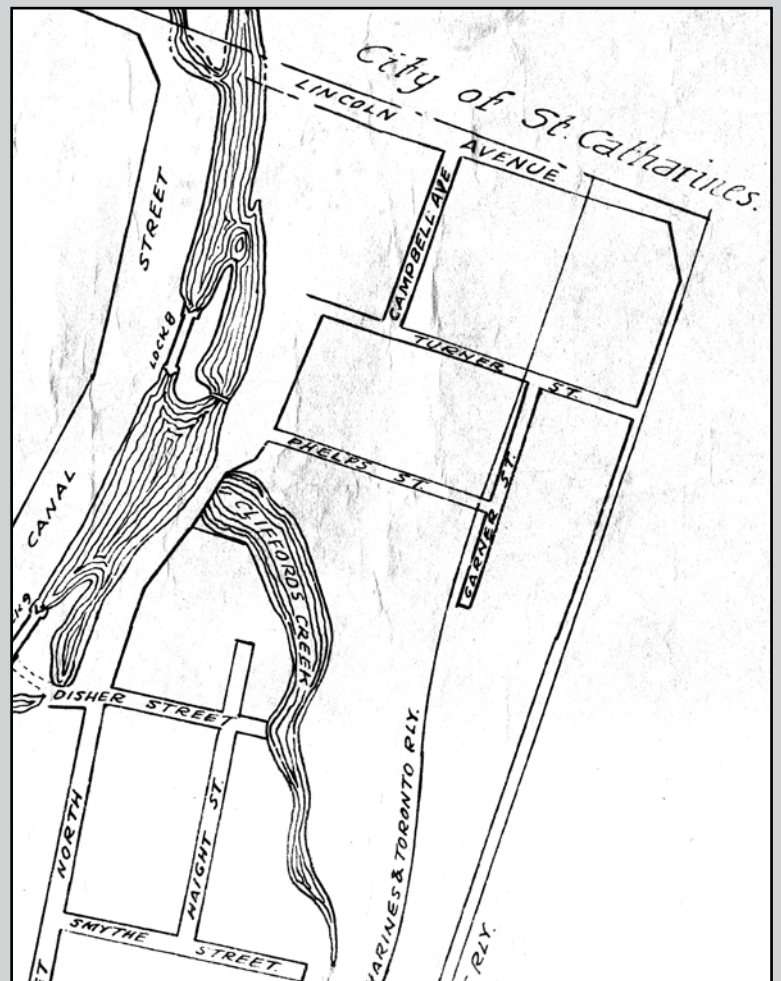


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Safe Injection Site on Queenston Street Renewed

The non-profit Positive Living Niagara organization on Queenston Street has just received news from the Ministry of Health that their safe injection site has approval to stay open.

This community organization is made up of dedicated and caring people who began with advocacy for HIV-positive individuals and their families. For those facing serious issues, they perform much-needed support. Their StreetWorks program distributes materials such as clean needles at their location and on the street. Outreach workers and paramedics are on site to ensure safe use. Volunteers are always welcome if they come free of judgement and with empathy for those who are living with addiction. The work of the volunteers is not to try to fix those who need the services of Positive Living.

ARENA SURVEYS

Did you have a chance to fill out the arena survey? The City of St. Catharines and the Arena Advisory Committee will analyze the online feedback provided and meet with those who use the arena and stakeholders, to contribute to an arena strategy. This will provide a road map for future needs of the five arenas owned by St. Catharines which are Merritton Centennial Arena, Seymour-Hannah Sports and Entertainment Centre, Garden City Arena Complex, Bill Burgoyne Arena, and Meridian Centre. Can we hope that the strategy will address the maintenance issues at our community's arena run by the Merritton Lions Club? Watch for the announcement of a public meeting in April.



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