

# London & Middlesex Historical Society

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<http://www.londonheritage.ca/londonmiddlesexhistoricalsociety/Pages/default.aspx>

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Newsletter

Fall 2012

## Our 2012 Publication

The Society's 2012 publication, *The Heart of Wortley Village: From Crown Land to Urban Community* was launched on November 7 at Landon Branch Library. Author Marvin Simner gave us an interesting talk about this neighbourhood. Remember that members receive a free copy so if you don't already have yours come to our November 21 Show & Tell meeting to pick one up.

## Change of Meeting Time for 2013

Starting in January 2013, our general meetings will be starting at **7:30 pm** instead of 8:00. Most other organizations start their evening meetings at about this time and an earlier start allows us all to get home sooner, especially important during the dark winter months. If there are any objections to this, let an executive member know – preferably before 2013!

## Society Contacts

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## A Word From the President

By Sandy McRae

Wow.... November already. It won't be long till Santa is out making the rounds with his flying helpers.

The London and Middlesex Historical Society has had a great year. We've enjoyed excellent guest speaker presentations, wonderful joint meetings and a reconfigured executive that ran tickety boo.

I hope everyone that was able to attend the September bus trip enjoyed it immensely. You may have noticed I've had Arthur McClelland, our Programme Chair, introduce our speakers this year at our general meetings. This made sense to me because it is through Arthur's hard work and communication skills that these individuals came to speak to us. Who better to introduce them than the person who contacted them in the first place? Programme Chair Arthur will give a brief recap of our meetings in our newsletters rather than me as part of my President's Report because it is a logical extension of his role.

Speaking of newsletters, we have decided to reduce the number of newsletters to four to keep things fresh. Jennifer Grainger, as you know, is the Newsletter Editor and she will provide deadlines for articles to be included for anyone who wishes to contribute. Please consider contributing an article or a notice of any special event you think the membership will enjoy. Jennifer has been solely responsible for editing, structure and content of the newsletter for the past eleven years but recently our Education Chair, Marvin Simner, has volunteered to help if help is needed.

Please be sure to let us know if you don't receive our publication for this year, Marvin Simner's "The Heart of Wortley Village," so that our Publication Chair Roxanne Lutz can ensure no one is missed.

I hope to see many grand treasures brought to our annual general meeting and Show and Tell November 21. See you there.

Cheers,

Sandy

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## **Our September 2012 Bus Trip**

On Saturday, September 22, 27 people participated in the bus trip jointly sponsored with the Chatham-Kent and London Region branches of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario. Our destination was Chatham-Kent. We left London at 8:30 and arrived at the Chatham-Kent Museum shortly after 10 am to meet our guide for the War of 1812 Tour. Our tour guides were John and Martha McGregor, early settlers of the Forks (in Chatham), dressed in period costume. Martha came on the bus first and was looking for her husband, John, who was strolling through the museum's parking lot tipping back a bottle of spirits. They referred to the bus as a Conestoga wagon and told us the year was 1813 after the Battle of Lake Erie on September 10 in which British fleet was defeated. They took us a route which is now known as the Tecumseh Parkway which follows the Thames River and winds its way through Chatham-Kent. This was the fateful journey taken by First Nations and the British as they were chased by the American forces during the War of 1812. The Parkway ends at the site of the Tecumseh Monument and the site of the Battle of the Thames where the great Chief Tecumseh was killed. Along the way, we met two women, Mary Smith, a single woman with no legs sitting outside St. Thomas' Anglican Church which was built on Smith farm property willed to the Diocese of Huron. We were able to see the interior of the church. After losing her way in a snowstorm, Mary's legs were frostbitten and were amputated by Hannah Dolsen, a local herbalist, whom we met picking flowers along the banks of the Thames River to put on the grave of her recently deceased husband, John. Before meeting Hannah, our Conestoga wagon was ordered to stop by Corporal Dave Welton of the 27th Regiment from New York. He was stationed at the Drake Sideroad where the American army camped on October 3rd. Corporal Welton boarded the bus and took one of the passengers (Theresa Regnier) as a hostage. Our next stop after meeting Hannah Dolsen was at Smith and Wilson Estate Wines ([www.smithandwilsonestatewines.ca](http://www.smithandwilsonestatewines.ca)) where we thoroughly enjoyed the delicious victuals (homemade lasagna, bread basket, seasonal salad and dessert) and libations. Smith and Estate Wilson Wines is a small family-owned winery with small batch, award-winning quality wines grown on a third generation century farm. All wines are produced on site with farm-grown grapes or fruit. After lunch, we returned to the Tecumseh Parkway and met Matthew Arnold (Jim Gilbert's son in real life) who saved his mill by burying the millstones in his field. We continued on the

Parkway which ends at the Tecumseh Monument near Fairfield where we met the last re-enactor, Colonel Richard Mentor Johnson from the Kentucky Mounted Regiment who gave us a very American-biased view of the War.

These re-enactors demonstrated to us what life would have been like living in Upper Canada during the War of 1812 when the land was under siege by the invading Americans who looted farms and villages and burnt houses and mills. Jim Gilbert has been involved in local history for many years. He is co-founder of Chatham-Kent's historic Spirit Walks, of "Heritage Days: The Faire at the Forks" and of historic bus tours. He also writes two weekly history columns for Chatham-Kent newspapers and news sites. Jim has authored four books on local history. Retired for ten years, Jim was an English and Drama teacher and a vice-principal for the Lambton Kent District School Board. He is currently the President of the Kent Historical Society.

The last stop of the day was the Fairfield Museum (<http://www.londonconference.ca/content/fairfield-museum>) in Moraviantown where a battle occurred on October 5 in which the village of Moraviantown, including the church, was destroyed. The bus trip was a stupendous success.

## **Our October Meeting**

On Wednesday, October 17, retired Fire Chief Jim Fitzgerald spoke to the Society about the Fire Department's transition from horse-drawn firefighting machinery to motorized fire trucks. As an introduction, he gave a brief history of London's fire department. London's volunteer fire brigade became a professional fire department on April 1, 1873 with Fire Chief Thomas Wastie earning an annual salary of \$400. That same year, the fire department received its first steam fire engine. It was drawn by horses until September 9, 1912 when the department received its first motorized fire truck, a Seagraves pumper nicknamed Kaiser Bill. On February 12, 1923, the London fire Department received its first motorized pumper built by the American LaFrance Engine Company in Toronto. By this time, the fire department had retired all its horses. Jim told a number of amusing anecdotes including one where a former fire department horse was sold to a garbage collector. Whenever a fire alarm would sound, the horse would take off for the nearest fire station sending garbage flying everywhere. Jim gave a very informative talk and the visuals were spectacular.

*Arthur McClelland*

## Antique shop closes, yet memories remain

By Roxanne Lutz

One of London's oldest antiques shops has closed its doors forever. Bud Gowan has retired his antiques store, selling the building to new owners. The owner of the shop is well deserving of a rest and has certainly earned his retirement. After more than 60 years in business as an antiques dealer and founder of Bud Gowan Formal wear, Bud is ready to officially retire.

Bud's story as an entrepreneur is quite interesting. As one of London's most unique and well-known shops, Bud Gowan Antiques opened its doors at the Clarence Street location in 1990. But long before that, Bud was an active member of London's retail community with his first business venture as a men's clothier in April of 1952. His first shop was located on Dundas Street, the current location of the Ontario Superior Court. He quickly developed a Canada-wide reputation as a retailer of fine quality menswear, superior customer service, style, and a special eye for detail. Owning or renting a Bud Gowan suit soon became a London tradition. During his time at the original Dundas Street location, Bud also opened an antiques store nearby on the same street. When the city appropriated both properties in 1970, he focused more on his antiques business and began exporting from the United Kingdom.

In 1971, Bud opened his menswear business at a new location on Clarence Street, where it grew to be so successful that he retired for the first time, in 1985. His son Paul carried on the business, strengthening the reputation for quality and style, running the menswear division while also growing the formal wear side of the business. The formal wear division expanded in 1981, moving to 184 York Street. In 2005, Paul sold both businesses and the successful Bud Gowan formal wear brand lives on today in London.

Despite his retirement from menswear, Bud decided to re-open his antiques business in 1990 at 387 Clarence Street. And what a perfect location. The building was built in the late 1890s as an extension to the Reid blank book and stationary factory to house the Featherbone Company which made corsets. The original Reid building, established in the late 1880s, burned down in 1923, so the building that Bud Gowan bought for his clothing shop, and later antiques shop, was itself an antique with its own story. In addition to housing the corset factory until the 1920s, the building was later used as a warehouse for The London Shoe Company in the 1940s and 50s.

When Bud Gowan moved onto the premises and set up shop to sell and collect antiques, he filled it with treasures purchased from local estates and imported from around the world; what was a passionate hobby ultimately became a thriving business.

Part of his success was his great memory for each piece in his shop, meaning one would also get a story with each purchase. Many items in the shop are personal, having a Bud Gowan history of their own, such as the stained glass window and menu from Seven Dwarfs restaurant where he and his wife Gwen met in 1950. This must be why sometimes Bud appeared reluctant to let pieces go and drove a hard bargain. His many signs around the shop made

one well aware that he meant business!

But while he may have been a savvy businessman, he was also a caring, approachable member of the downtown retail community.

### Store closed

According to the family, many pieces had already been sold to collectors and dealers around the country before the store closed. With the last few months being busy as they sorted through years of memories and five floors of furniture, paintings, clocks and London memorabilia, Bud, his son Paul, daughter-in-law Sue, and the rest of his family were glad to have so many people visit the store and purchase items, which would hopefully lighten the packing job of the now defunct establishment. The building on Clarence was sold to new owners John and Nancy Fyfe-Millar, who plan to renovate and turn the majority of the building into apartments with the hope of preserving as much of the history as possible.

As he greeted old friends who came to visit during the sale, one can see that he enjoyed the thrill of the hunt in acquiring all the treasures in his shop; also, he deeply enjoyed being a salesperson and talking with people. "You really should buy something you know...", he would tell them with that familiar twinkle in his eye, "last chance".

When I stopped in during the last days of the closing sale, he approached me and asked "What are you after?" and I said, "Just a visit and a piece of history". I chatted with Bud for a spell, purchasing a few small items – a farthing, an old Humane Society pin and 1867 copy of Lord Lytton's Gothic novel *A Strange Story*.

So what do you get a man who's had five floors of collectibles for upward of a quarter century for a retirement gift? I gave him a hardcover copy of *Fragments of the Forks* of course! Bud Gowan is mentioned on page 261. How else do you thank such a good friend to London than by showing him written history's nod to the mark he made on our city. He spent many years collecting, preserving, and sharing London's history along with encouraging interest in history overall. London's Bud will not soon be forgotten.

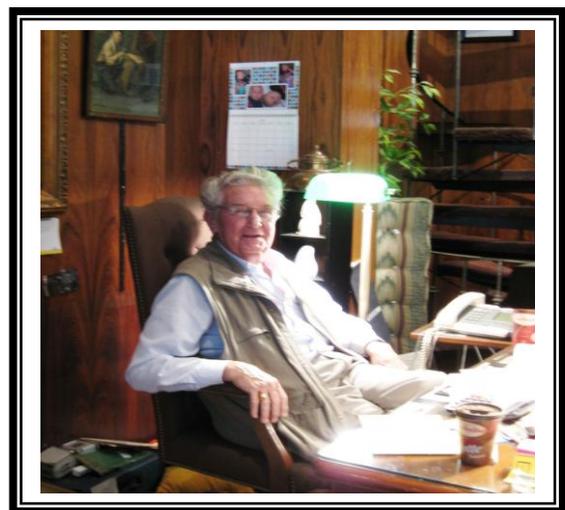


Photo by Roxanne Lutz

## An Urban Myth?

### The Pool at Lord Roberts Public School

By Dan Brock

My interest in the pool at Lord Roberts Public School began in May of this year, with a query from Dick Johnston. Dick is a member of The London & Middlesex Historical Society and currently lives in Orillia. He had been a pupil at Lord Roberts between 1947 and 1955 and said that there was a swimming pool at the school which was used during his time as storage for books, etc. According to Dick, "it may be an old urban myth but I was always told that the swimming pool...was closed as there had been a drowning there before my time..."

Lord Roberts School was opened in 1916 and stands on the site of "Bleak House," the former residence of the George Macbeth family on the northwest corner of Princess Avenue and Maitland Street. The new school replaced the outgrown Princess Avenue School on the north side of Princess Avenue between Waterloo and Colborne, immediately west of the later site of the Jarvis Apartments. The school had evolved from what was originally the two-room Bond Street School erected in 1862.

What is remarkable about Lord Roberts School is that it was the first school in London, and the only public elementary school, to have an indoor heated swimming pool!

The architects of Lord Roberts were McBride & Gilbert (Herbert C. McBride and H. Bryan Gilbert) and Arthur E. Nutter. The cost of the site was \$30,000 and the construction of the building, exclusive of furniture, was \$69,295 or approximately \$593,000 and \$1,250,100 respectively in today's currency.

Harry MacLean, who taught at Lord Roberts between 1967 and 1970, believed the same architect who designed the school also designed the London Technical and Art School (now H.B. Beal Secondary School), officially opened in January 1919. Harry notes that "many common architectural details including the glazed orange brick in the corridors" can be seen in both. Indeed, Nutter, who was both city architect and building inspector since 1908, was the architect for the Technical and Art School.

One of the pupils who transferred from Princess Avenue to Lord Roberts in 1916 was Bud Adams. Fifty years later he recalled the school's pool. "We used to have a whale of time down there, but we made so much noise they stopped us from swimming in it."

The pool was apparently still being used early in 1930. It was described as "13 ft. 6 inches wide, 26 ft. long and average depth 4 ft., with an approximate capacity of 9,000 gals. To raise the temperature of the water to 68 degrees would require 200 lbs. of hard coal per day for 6 days. This would allow the pool to be used from Wednesday afternoon till Saturday evening at a cost of coal, at present contract rate of \$12.80 per ton, for \$7.68.

"The Actual cost per week would be: Coal, \$7.68; water, \$1.65 (changing once a week), totalling \$9.33. These figures represent the lowest cost and make no allowance for payment of janitor if used after hours."

No further use of the pool for swimming is to be found in the printed minutes of the London Board of Education. A handwritten exchange with a school in London, England, however, dated 1935, and found at the Western Archives, does make mention of "a Swimming Pool" at Lord Roberts.

According to George Pudney, who currently lives in St. Thomas, the pool was never in operation during his time. He attended the school from 1932 through 1939 and had been informed by an older sister that someone had drowned in the pool. Patricia Bryant, who started at Lord Roberts in 1935, "never heard of anyone ever using the pool" during the eight years she was there. She also notes that: "In 1941 or 1942 I happened to be in the pool area and the teacher asked us if we wanted to see the pool. None of us had ever seen it before. It was empty of water and we were told that it was not in use."

Based on the above, we can presume that the use of the pool for swimming ceased sometime between 1930 and 1932. In fact, in the 1930s, swimming lessons for the pupils at Lord Roberts were taken at the Y.M.C.A.

During the 1939-40 school year, wooden poles were spread across the empty pool to temporarily store coat hangers collected by the pupils for the war effort. The following school year it was used to store six- and 11-quart baskets, again presumably for the same purpose.

By the early 1950s the pool area, "right beside the Industrial Arts area on the ground floor," was used as a storage room and teachers' and janitor's smoking area.

In the summer of 1955 the pool area was fitted up as a classroom. During Harry MacLean's first year at Lord Roberts, Kathy Bugg's grade 2 class occupied this room. He too had heard of a drowning in the school's pool sometime in the distant past, i.e. prior to World War II. As for the classroom, it later became a boys' and girls' change room and a corridor.

Despite many former pupils, teachers and others' claim that the pool was closed because someone had drowned in it, presumably about 1930, no verification of this can be found either in the printed minutes of the London Board of Education or in the newspaper clipping files of drownings, near drownings, etc. and scrapbook collection as found in the London Room at the Central Library.

Dick Johnston wrote in June 2012: "More and more I am thinking that since no one seems to have any anecdotal family or social history on a drowning, it is probably an urban myth that got passed around....Surely the death of a young child in the 30's or 40's would have been remembered for years by any number of families, more so as London was a relatively small 'city' in those years." This conclusion was echoed by his former classmate, George Anas: "If someone had drowned in the pool, it would have been in the newspapers and in the various historical books on London. In those books that I have read, I do not recall any such death being mentioned. Therefore unless there is something concrete, it must be an urban legend."

At present, my own position is that the pool at Lord Roberts was closed about 1930 as an economic measure following the onset of the Great Depression. As for the pool being closed due to the drowning of a child, I believe that it could have been a story made up by the older pupils in the early 1930s to frighten the younger ones. Over time this story became so much a part of the lore of Lord Roberts that even subsequent teachers accepted it as fact.

In light of the absence of any proof of a drowning, however, the account should be taken as one of London's urban myths.



*Lord Roberts School – Photo by Glen Curnoe*

### **Western History Talks at London Public Library**

A new series of history lectures are being held at London Public Library this fall. They are in the Stevenson & Hunt Room on Tuesdays at 7 pm. Some have already taken place but we can still look forward to the following:

- November 20** – Tim Compeau on Loyalism in 1812
- November 27** – Craig Simpson on Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, 1863
- December 4** – Alan MacEachern on Parks Canada and Londoner Mabel Williams, 1920

### **Forgotten Stories of London Continue**

Mondays, same time and place as above:

- November 19** – Deb Majer, Diocese of London Archivist, on St. Peter's Seminary 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary
- November 26** – Arthur McClelland on Wonderland Gardens
- December 3** – Hilary Bates Neary on Simon Zealotes Watson in 1812

### **LMHS Archives**

For many years the Society's records have been kept in two locations, the London Room at LPL's Central Branch, and at Western Archives. Recently the executive decided all records should be kept in one archival location. After a subcommittee's recommendations, it has been decided to move all records to Western Archives. While LPL is open longer hours and material may be viewed on shorter notice, Western has more space for new acquisitions. Once our collection is permanently part of Western Archives, all our old speeches, bulletins, calendars, tours, etc. will be professionally described and stored.

### **Rings Attached**

Society member Glen Curnoe's article in the Fall 2012 edition of Woodfield News describes the iron rings attached to the new curb on Prospect Avenue. In the old days of the horse and buggy, a horse would be tethered to a ring while waiting for its owner's return. Prospect Avenue had some original rings attached to the curb but several had been lost during street work. Local blacksmith John Pedersen Jr. was appointed by Woodfield heritage enthusiasts to replace the rings along the new curbs. Pedersen obliged by making new rings to take the place of the missing originals. Now this lovely historic street is the only one in London where horse rings can be seen. Promenade along Prospect and see for yourself.

### **Deadlines for Submissions to Winter Newsletter**

Please have all articles, reports, and notices to Jennifer by **January 23 at the latest**.

"There's an old saying about those who forget history. I don't remember it but it's good." – *Stephen Colbert*.

### **ACO Ghost Sign Contest**

Take a picture of your favourite "ghost sign" and enter it into ACO London's Ghost Sign Contest. Ghost signs are those faded signs of former businesses you see on commercial buildings in the older parts of London. One day they may disappear or be painted over so it's important to record them now. See <http://acolondon.ca/acolondon/Events.html> for more info. The assembled collection will be exhibited during Heritage Week 2013 and winners will receive a framed copy.

## **The London & Middlesex Historical Society's Programme for 2013**

All meetings are at the Old Courthouse on the third Wednesday of the month at **7:30 pm** unless otherwise noted.

January 16: Doug Teeter - "The London Free Press: the Early Years."

February 20: Harold Gilbert - "Tour of Middlesex County in Postcards."

Joint Meeting with the UELs: Tuesday, March 12, 7 pm, Westmount Branch Library: Al McGregor - Author reading from his historical fiction entitled, *A Porous Border*.

Joint Meeting with the ACO, St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church: April 17 - Arthur McClelland - "St. John the Evangelist: The Early Years, 1864-1888." Followed by a tour of the church.

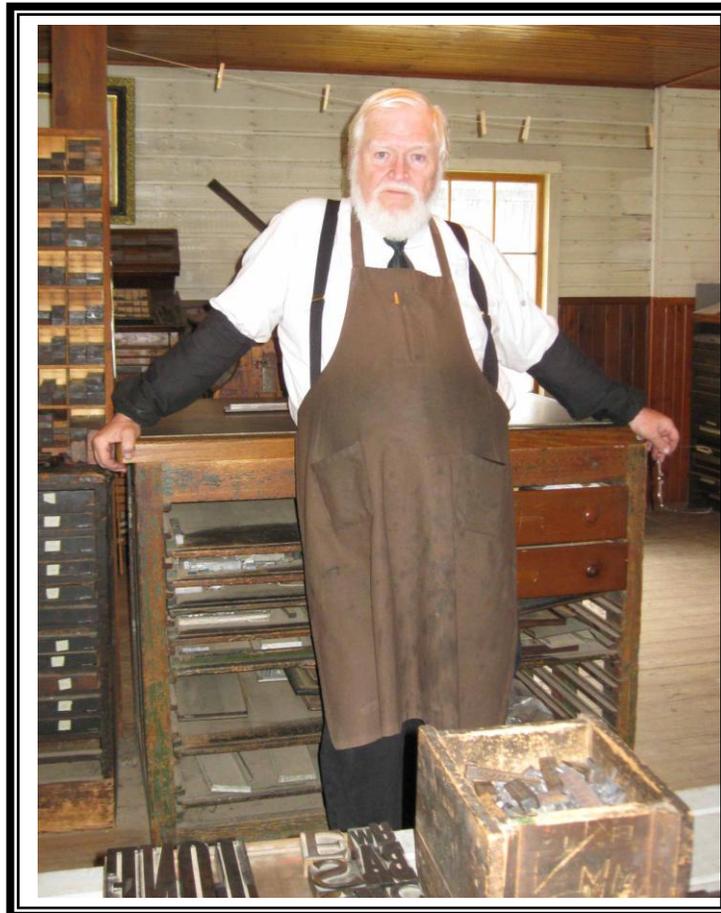
May 15: Doug Leighton - "History of the Ford Motor Company in London and St. Thomas."

June 19: Arthur McClelland - "Catholic Celebrations, 1913-2013: A Brief History of the Precious Blood Monastery, St. Angela's College and Academy, St. Michael's Church and St. Patrick's Church."

Joint Bus Trip with ACO: Saturday, September 21 - Elmira/St. Jacob's?

October 16: Dan Brock - "Reservoir Hill and the War of 1812."

November 20: AGM and Show & Tell.



Our January speaker, Doug Teeter. Photo courtesy of Roxanne Lutz.