

# MERRITTON MATTERS

Fall/Winter 2008 • St. Catharines, Ontario • Volume 8 • merrittonmatters@hotmail.com



## Inside This Issue:

- Cenotaph Plaza
- Kudos
- Postcards
- We Won!
- Merritton in the Fifties
- Legion Report
- Centennial Park Garden
- Labour Day 2009
- More You Know You're From Merritton If...
- Recommendation for Len Birchall
- New Trivia

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## Who Writes the MM Articles?

Several inquiries were made last month about who writes the articles for Merritton Matters. Lorraine Giroux is the chief contributor of articles as well as the editor. We always put a notice on the inside front cover stating this fact so we don't put her name on the articles because the pages would be chock full of LG's! However, because of the questions, we will strive to place her name on articles that strictly reflect the editor's opinion just so there won't be any confusion.

We appreciate the contributions of Tom Barwell, Sheila (Craig) Marlow, Robert Mussell and Phyllis Thomson.

If you have an article for this paper, or even ideas for articles, please send us an email to [merrittonmatters@hotmail.com](mailto:merrittonmatters@hotmail.com).

## Who Took the Pictures for This Issue?

Jean Westlake is our main photographer. For this issue, we also used pictures provided to us by the Niagara Falls Public Library and the Director's Guild of Canada.

## Upcoming Events in Merritton

- January 20th Annual General Meeting for Merritton Community Group
- February Lions will celebrate their 70th anniversary
- March 28th Lioness will celebrate their 60th anniversary
- May 19th MCG Open House at the Merritton Seniors Centre  
- All welcome!

## We Really Do Want to Dance

Unfortunately, we've had a string of bad luck with our past dance plans featuring Jeffrey and the Juniors. The dance planned for November had to be cancelled because the group disbanded after our advertising had already been launched!

Now we're almost set to announce the band that will play at the Merritton Community Centre on Saturday, March 28, 2009 for our fundraising Signs of Spring dance! At our recent meeting we decided to direct all profits from our upcoming dance to the Mountain Locks Park Sign project.

Put this date on your calendar with a big red circle - the wait will have been worth it.

## Letters to the Editor

The latest edition of Merritton Matters has arrived with an article written by Phyllis Thomson entitled "The Richardsons of Merritton". Our entire family has very much enjoyed reading the article which was very well researched by Phyllis (as are all of her articles).

Both of our sons have resided in Merritton although both have now moved, one to north St. Catharines and one to Thorold. Our older son lived at 2 Walnut Street, his great grandparents' home having been located at 24 Walnut Street.

Thanks to you and Ms. Thomson for the delightful article. I must say that we also enjoy the articles by Tom Barwell who has rekindled many memories of our childhood in Merritton.

Regards,  
Thomas A. Richardson

-----  
Your article about the Richardson's brought back a few memories to me. We bought most of our groceries there and I remember Frank delivering them. And if we ran out of something Mother would send one of us to the store. One day when I was just a kid, she sent me to buy brown sugar. I had a quarter in my hand and instead of asking for a quarter's worth of sugar, I asked for a quarter of a pound. I remember how embarrassed I was when they phoned my Mom about my strange request! Most things that are packaged now were not packaged then. I remember peanut butter was sold in buckets. You would get say half a pound scooped into a wooden boat lined with greaseproof paper.



Mr. Richardson was a faithful member of Elm St. United Church and was in the church choir, as was my Dad, Levi Bruegeman, and I was in it for a number of years also. There were quite a few of us teenagers and we liked to chew gum but some thought it was not "proper." So our chair president Al Brisson said we should take a vote on it and the gum chewers won!

Irene Bruegeman Barron

## Trivia

No one responded to the picture in the last issue. We have found that the cement plaza was located on the west side of Hartzel in the approximate area where Midas Muffler sits now and around where Willis' had their abbatoir.

So, let's have some new trivia! How about trivia that deals with the here-and-now so newer Merrittonians can participate? Merritton seems to be becoming the destination of choice when it comes to breakfast and it might even overtake our reputation for used car lots. Can you name all the locations in our ward that serve breakfast? We'll even have a prize awarded for a correct response drawn from among all the correct responses we receive.



**Peter Kormos, MPP**  
Welland

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## Merritton in the Fifties (and Earlier)

By Sheila (Craig) Marlow

My husband and I have not lived in the area for many years but both of us have wonderful memories of MHS where we met and, after 'going steady' as they used to say, eventually married and raised three daughters.

I grew up on Maple Street, now Maplecrest, in a vibrant, mixed neighbourhood of Scots, English and Italians. Residents of Maple Street bore British names like Boyle, Wilson, Makinson, Cameron, Catterall, Cowan, McGlynn and Turner and most of the older ones never lost their accent from the 'old country'. However, the street off Maple Street, named William St. in those days, was filled with warm and boisterous extended Italian families like the Girotti's and the Muratori's, with a couple of Scots thrown in for good measure.

My father's entire family lived in Merritton, his mother, three brothers and four sisters, all of them having emigrated from a small village in Scotland. Around the same time, my mother emigrated from Edinburgh, met my father and was married in St. Patrick's Church. My mother had come over to work at the Rubberworks, now The Keg, accompanied by numerous other young single women to work in either the Merritton or the Port Dalhousie factory. They made rubber boots, and money was docked from their wages each week to pay back the cost of their boat passage to Canada.

My mother and her friends went to live in a boarding house run by a Mrs. Haney, in the building that was to achieve prominence later as Ricci's Tavern. My mother told many stories of the fun and nonsense that took place where these adventurous young women lived and evidently, in spite of strict rules and Mrs. Haney's careful stewardship, romance blossomed between the girls and the young men in town.

My father met my mother and took her on their first date to the movie theatre, where she promptly lost the heel of her shoe walking down the aisle. Apparently this misadventure did not deter my father in any way, since they soon tied the knot. They bought a small house on Maple Street, next door to my Auntie Smith and two doors from my Uncle Tam Cowan. No one moved in those days, and all stayed put until the end of their lives. We all grew up in that house, attended South Ward, Central and Merritton High Schools. My brothers and sister all remember Mrs. Wilson from South Ward, Miss Kline, Miss Zimmerman, Mr. Crandon and Mr. Richardson from Central School. And from MHS, I remember well Principal Fred Harvie, Mr. Smith, Mrs. Falkewicz, Misses Shantz and Vallely, and of course the school secretary, Mrs. Riesberry. And who could forget the redoubtable C.P. Wilson, my nemesis in algebra class, and Miss Batchelor, who taught us how to make white sauce.

Maple Street was a dead-end street, and at the end was a set of stairs leading down to the railway tracks. Across the tracks was a large grassy field, filled with daisies and wild canaries in the summer, and with a small pond that froze in the winter that we all skated on. We called this Krsul's pond because just beyond it was their farm, where our friends Frank and George Krsul lived. If this all sounds a bit idealistic, the reality was that nobody in our neighbourhood had a lot of money. Many families did not own a car or a television and we were happy enough with our second hand skates and bicycles. Eating out in a restaurant was almost unheard of, except perhaps for fries and a cherry coke at The Crystal on James Street in 'the city' after a movie. Do any of your readers remember a little cafe called The Bluebird on Merritt Street near Elm? After bowling at the brand new community centre, we would sometimes go there for hamburgers and play "I Walk the Line" on the jukebox.

Thank you Merritton Matters for stirring up some old recollections. I will continue to enjoy your publication, happy to read about and remember a vibrant, small and friendly community.

## It's a Glass Half Full

Merritton is a great area of St. Catharines to live in. We're proud of our community and pleased to see the way that people are maintaining or improving the appearance of their houses. Increasingly people want to move to Merritton and you see it in real estate ads when they promote this location. So, we have to look on the bright side and say it's a good thing that the property values are up in Merritton. Our homes are worth more and it reflects the desirability of the area. But...we also know that many homeowners thought 'tax increase' when they opened up that envelope from MPAC (Municipal Property Assessment Corp.) recently. We're not sure yet exactly what it will mean as we're told that the increase in assessment might not mean an increase in taxes because it's based on the average increase for the municipality.

If you are concerned about the assessed value of your property, check it out by going to the web site of MPAC, [www.mpac.ca](http://www.mpac.ca) and click on the program titled "AboutMyProperty". There you can review how your property was assessed and compare its value against the approximate value of similar places in your area. If, after checking the data, you feel you could not have sold your property for the assessed amount shown, or more, on January 1st, 2008, you may file for reconsideration by (a) writing MPAC at the address shown on your notice, or (b) phoning them at 1-866-296-MPAC (6722). You have until March 31st, 2009 to file a request for reconsideration.

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# MIGHTY MERRITTONIANS

## DGC Honours Ken

Congratulations to Merritton native Ken Girotti for his recent recognition from the Directors Guild of Canada at their awards ceremony on November 9, 2008 at the Fairmont Royal York in Toronto. The Directors Guild of Canada (DGC) is a national organization in the film and television industry covering all areas of direction, design, production and editing. Ken was presented with an Outstanding Achievement Craft award for his direction of the made-for-television movie *Mayerthorpe* which dealt with the murder of four RCMP officers on March 3, 2005.



## Way to Go Bryce

We salute Bryce Honsinger for his work inspiring and challenging elementary school students to explore Canada's past. Bryce, an Applewood Public School teacher, was one of 25 finalists for the prestigious Governor General's Award for Excellence in Teaching Canadian History. Students in his class already know the excitement of recreating pivotal events in Canadian history and now his engaging classroom has been recognized nationally.

## Kudos to Editor Pat

Pat Grant deserves praise for her work on the Elm Street United Church's publication entitled *Memories*. Pat, her committee and contributors have produced a wonderful book of memories that tells the story of people of the past and present who have been involved in the church. As former minister Elliston Bridger so eloquently remarks in the introduction, 'Good memories of days gone by can nourish us. Good souls of our years past can live on in memory and sustain us. Good thoughts from other times can come from the shadows of memory to strengthen us.' Besides the work of Pat and Elliston, the committee and contributors consisted of the following people:

Irene Bruegeman Barron, Linda McIntosh Beaulieu, Dorothy Putnam Bombay, Mrs. F.C. Bryan, Paulette Chesebrough, Henry and Hilda Clement, Joyce Taylor Cowan, Lois Eplett, Treva Fawcett, Isobel Gibson, Fred and Maye Green, Danielle Henderson, Kay Jeanneret, Mike Johnson, Chris Logan, Donald Logan, Jack McIntosh, Dawn Peters, Rev. Thomas Smith, Idabelle Bryan Somerville, Joyce Fawcett Stares, Rev. Ron Wallace, Laura Williams, Kim Yungblut and Lois Zulkowski.

Contact Elm Street's church office for information on how to obtain this delightful history.



PHOTO CREDIT: NIAGARA FALLS PUBLIC LIBRARY

## Feeling the Cold Yet Brent?

We just can't stop smiling when we think about Brent Pfab losing all his hair. You see Brent just wasn't satisfied with the United Way contributions of his fellow Ridley staff members so he decided to motivate everyone to dig deeper for a good cause. So when the staff and students hit the mark with money and participation rate, off went the awesome beard and full head of hair at an assembly. Well done Brent!

## Merritton Legion Celebrates 80 Years of Continued Community Service

By R. Mussell

Royal Canadian Legion Merritton Branch 138 is celebrating 80 years of continuous community service. The Merritton Legion has a membership of nearly 500 members and continues to flourish as an important member of the Merritton community.

To date, the Merritton Legion, through its Poppy campaign alone, has donated several thousand dollars to the community, be it helping Veterans or Families of Veterans in times of need or purchasing beds, etc for the local area hospitals. Other donations help sponsor a Cadet Corp and Cub Pack along with other projects and local area sports events.

Recently, the Merritton Legion and the Merritton Lions Club teamed up to present a Fundraising Jamboree to raise funds towards the Merritton Cenotaph Restoration Project taken on by the St Catharines Green Committee. All entertainment was donated by local entertainers. A cheque for \$ 2525.00 was recently presented by the President of the Merritton Lions, Arnold Harnott and President of the Royal Canadian Legion Merritton Br. 138, Jack Gemmell to Sheila Morra of the St Catharines Green Committee.

The Merritton Legion offers many community events throughout the year, be it the Friday Fish Fries every 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Friday of the month or the Breakfast at the Legion every 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the month. Immediately after the Fish Fries, you are welcome to join everyone in the lounge downstairs for entertainment with our very own Smokey David Downes Karaoke, one of many local entertainers brought in for your enjoyment.

The Merritton Legion always welcomes interest in new membership. Why not come in and see what we offer? You may just be our newest member.

## Recalling Fire Services

Photographs first published in the Standard have been gathered together by Brian Phair in a new publication from the St. Catharines Museum entitled *Fire Services in Niagara 1937-1950*. The book includes a variety of images from spectacular fires to fire services members, both volunteer and professional. Autographed copies of this book are available at the Museum, as well as at Chapters (Fairview), and Coles (Pen Centre, Niagara Falls, Welland). The cost is \$24.95 with a 10% discount for Museum members if purchased at the Museum. This is the second in a series of books from The Standard Collection. The first, *Niagara through the Lens: the shots that set The Standard*, is available in soft cover, hard cover, and a Special Edition.

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## We Won the Community Corner Award!!!

Our **Heritage Bin Project** won a Communities in Bloom Ontario award for our use of trash bins to depict historical events, icons and buildings. These bins, several of which adorned the last issue's cover, were our unique way of honouring Merritton's heritage while creating works of public art to enhance our streetscapes.

Communities in Bloom Ontario inspires communities to enhance the visual appearance of their neighbourhoods, public spaces, parks and streetscape with the belief that communities that look successful are most likely to be successful. Our success is a result of the dedicated efforts by many volunteers. Thanks go to:

- Perry Wakulich of Collegiate, who along with his enthusiastic and talented art students, devoted many hours of their time to this project as a club activity. Thanks as well to the dedicated students at Pinehurst School for their skill, hard work and diligence.
- Stephanie Rose for her help in the final hours of project.
- Bob Reidiger, Gord Campbell and Ross Stretton, City of St. Catharines staff, for logistics support in making sure that the bins were where they should be at the right time.
- Geoff Crane for his coordination of our use of the arena and his help with bin delivery
- Elizabeth Freeman-Shaw of District School Board of Niagara for alerting our editor, Lorraine Giroux, to the possibilities of applying for grants
- Jean Westlake, Sandy Burns, Morag Enright, Doreen England, Barbara Knight Woodward and Sheila Morra for their work in coordinating the luncheon and unveiling of the project
- Sheila Morra and Barbara Knight-Woodward for all their work in coordination of the project
- Mark Molnar, town crier for creating a fitting celebratory opening



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## *Rod Mawhood filed this report on the* **MERRITTON ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION**

In early 2008, the Merritton Novice Bulldogs hockey team was invited to the Silver Stick International Finals in Michigan. This is the first time in the history of MAA that a team was invited to such a prestigious tournament. After representing Merritton proudly in Michigan, this team advanced all the way to the O.M.H.A. finals before bowing out to a tough Lambeth team. And while hockey wrapped up, soccer and baseball began on the pitches and sandlots of Merritton. After a slow start, the Merritton Rookie ball team turned it up and won the Niagara North Interlock Baseball League, while the PeeWees advanced to the District Finals. MAA Soccer was represented by nine teams and soccer school.

The 2008-2009 Hockey campaign is well underway. A great night was held by all at Merritton Minor Hockey Night with the Niagara Ice Dogs. It seemed only fitting that the Bulldogs and Ice Dogs hit it off. Liam Ashe, a member of the Merritton Novice Bulldogs, was the winner of the autographed IceDogs stick. Liam sold 27 tickets to the December 6th game vs. Windsor.

The MAA Volunteer Night was held in November and several individuals took home some much deserved awards.

- Russ Rutherford is the 2008 recipient of the John Dempsey Award which is handed out annually to an individual who has contributed to youth sports in Merritton. Mr. Rutherford has been a member of the Merritton Lions Club since 1961 and was on the committee responsible for building the arena. Russ contributed greatly to the arena renovation fund and this past year made a substantial contribution to the MAA, with a request that the money donated go towards registration fees. A special thank you to Russ.
- Jordan Burge is the 2008 Roger Smith Memorial Award winner. This award is handed out annually to a Merritton youth that has demonstrated leadership and dedication to the MAA. Jordan has done both. He volunteered in many capacities: hockey school for two years; timekeeping for house league games; at mini-fest; and as assistant coach with the Merritton Girls rep soccer team. Jordan played sports at both the house league and rep level and is well deserving of this award.
- MAA Hockey Volunteer of the Year: Jason VanVolkenburg
- MAA Soccer Volunteer of the Year: Gerry Saxton
- MAA Baseball Volunteer of the Year: Mike Kvirng
- MAA Ball Hockey Volunteer of the Year: Terry and Dana Reed

A big thank you is sent out to all those who were involved in making this night a success - volunteers, sponsors, and ward councillor Jennie Stevens.

As the MAA turns the page on 2009, here are two exciting events worth noting on your calendar. Saturday January 17th is the night of the Philadelphia Fundraiser. Everyone is welcome for the Silent Auction, Dance, dance and drinks. The Merritton - Wissahickon Hockey Exchange is the longest such running event in North America. The year 2009 marks the 45th time that the event will take place. Merritton is the host with events happening on Valentine's Day Weekend. Why not stop by Merritton's Centennial Arena to see what this great exchange is all about?

For all the latest news on the Merritton Athletic Association, check out the website at [www.maasports.ca](http://www.maasports.ca).

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# Sunday, October 19th was a wonderful day!



CITY OF ST. CATHARINES GREEN COMMITTEE



## Getting Ready...

Our community was a hive of activity on Sunday, October 19<sup>th</sup>. There was a group of volunteers from the Merritton Community Group, Pinehurst students and the Green Committee preparing the Cenotaph for its grand unveiling. They were sweeping, raking, planting and making the area look spectacular for the November 7th unveiling.

## The Unveiling...

- Tall ornamental grasses looking like soldiers standing at attention
- Coloured concrete of porcelain grey for the coloured plaza area and stripping of 'musky mulberry' in a 'soldier course' pattern
- Shrubs blanketing the ground
- Perennial plants remaining everlasting
- Eight benches begging for pausing and reflecting

The project has been brought to success through the work of The Green Committee, the Merritton Community Group, the St. Catharines Horticultural Society, the Merritton Legion, the Merritton Lions and Lioness Clubs, businesses such as Pirie Appliances, Lamb Bocchinfuso Funeral Home, Valleybrook Gardens, J J Bakker & Sons, St Amands/Plants Choice, Stevensville Garden Centre and L. St. Amand Enterprises and private donors.



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# MERRITTON TOWN HALL

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Merritton's Town Hall, located at 343 Merritt Street, is a wonderful example of historic Victorian architecture. Built with 18 inch solid stone walls, it was designed by William B. Allen and constructed in 1879 by Walker Brothers for a tendered price of \$3000.

Local sandstone was used for the exterior of the 70 foot by 60 foot wide building. John Walker, the founder of Walker Brothers Quarries, had emigrated from Scotland in the 1840's where he trained and worked as a marble cutter. In 1875 he started his own stone cutting business and he was the person responsible for cutting the stone to construct the Merritton Town Hall. The most distinct feature, a projecting bell tower, comprises a great amount of detailed stone work and an interesting shaped roof. The tower was built by Michael Nestoe for \$484.

The attractive rectangular structure of the Town Hall has several notable architectural features including contrasting corner stones of the walls. It has radiating wedge-shaped stones forming the curved parts of the arch over the windows and doors. The hip roof is trimmed with a boxed cornice, or ledge, with a frieze and brackets. The double front doors have a fan transom, or horizontal beam, and are inset in the centre of the bell tower

The second floor of the building was equipped as a meeting hall and became the centre of the town's social activities. This was essential because none of the churches or schools had halls or auditoriums at that time. All their social activities such as Christmas parties, plays, minstrel shows and dances were held at the town hall. Two rooms on the main floor were used for the Mechanics Institute and Library and remained in use until 1924 when the library was constructed across the street. Among other municipal offices provided was the police department and they had suitable accommodation in the basement for their cell customers.

During the years of the Boer War and the First and Second World Wars, the town hall was the scene of all war activities. Here the Red Cross

had their workrooms, ration books were issued and the Civil Defence was trained.

Immediately after WW1 the Fire Department, which was the service club of that time, operated movie pictures in the upper hall on a regular basis. This was quite an innovation at the time. From this revenue, they purchased the war memorial, fenced the sports park and financed other worthy projects. For many years, the badminton club operated in the upper hall and provided healthy recreation for adults. The Boy Scouts also met there starting around 1920.

A fire in 1929 burned the rear portion and the entire roof. When the building was repaired, the stairway was removed from the inner hall and the outside entrance on the north side added along with the two fire escapes. On close inspection, it appears that this entrance still exists but without the fire escapes.

The building served as the municipal offices until the end of 1960 when amalgamation occurred and the St. Catharines assessment department occupied the building. They remained there until 1964 and the main floor was vacant until the Museum Board was granted use in 1965. The St. Catharines Museum opened on June 4th, 1967 and remained at the former Merritton Town Hall until it relocated to Welland Canal's Lock 3 in 1990.

Merritton's Town Hall is a property designated by city council under the Heritage Act to be an official heritage site and is owned by the City of St. Catharines. Approximately 7,228 square feet in area, it is now a fully accessible building which is home to the St. Catharines Senior's Centre as part of the city's Recreation & Community Services. Senior citizens get together at this location to socialize, play bingo, cards, and shuffleboard. The Merritton Community Group holds their meetings here on the third Tuesday of every month, starting at 7:00 p.m. and it is also the location of the MCG's spring Open House.

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## THE EDITOR'S POINT OF VIEW

*The former Merritton Town Hall is an architecturally significant building that is falling into disrepair. Yet there does not appear to have been continued regular maintenance and one has to wonder why. An email about the city's plans for maintenance to the building was sent to Colin Briggs, city administrator, but no reply was received as of date of publication. During the celebration of the Merritton Cenotaph, people looked over and commented on areas of the building that called out for attention. Finally, in late November we heard news that negotiations may be underway to sell this building to a private developer. While we have a tremendous amount of respect for what has been accomplished by this developer, is it right to sell our heritage building? The community has just rallied behind the upgrading of the Cenotaph! Will the Cenotaph plaza remain and will regular users such as the Merritton Seniors continue to have access to the building? Admittedly, other heritage buildings are privately owned. The Lybster Mill and the Rubber Works plants have turned out very well but they were private industries and now we're talking about a landmark building that was once the centre of our community. The Mayor was reported as saying that if the building is sold, it will be 'properly maintained and remain standing in perpetuity' but somehow this sounds vague to me. LG*



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Issue**

• **The Munroe Family has provided us with pictures from a celebration held May 6, 1946 at the Old Merritton High School.**

• **Learn how to research World War 1 soldiers.**



# Main's Hill

By Tom Barwell

At the corner of Merritt and Chestnut Street there is a deep depression in the ground next to what was at one time Main's drugstore. History claims that it was originally part of a spillway that somehow connected to the old Welland canal. Obviously the rest was filled in and why this section remained is a mystery. Naturally it became known as "Main's Hill", Merritton's own "Olympic Stadium".

Almost every sport was played there and it included a few invented ones. In the summer there was baseball, football, soccer and lacrosse just to name a few. A couple of other mentionable ones were mountain biking and rock climbing that took place up the wall at the east end. We were ahead of our time it seems.

In the winter the primary sport was sledding. The hill would be a mass of kids and a few parents barrelling down the hill on all sorts of sliding implements. Cardboard was the main choice as it was readily available due to the nearness of Main's and Richardson's grocery. Snow ramps were built to add a little more to the excitement factor.

There were fabulous snowball fights with different participants in ever changing armies. Large forts were built at either end and the air would be filled with the buzz of snowball artillery. The warriors would be urged on by youthful spectators who had a ringside seat on the iron railing at the end. Even adults would pause in their daily chores to gaze in awe at the spectacle, no doubt wishing they could join in.

As always there was the daredevil factor. It was found that by pouring warm water down the steepest section of the hill it was easy to construct a beautiful icy path, great for sliding on any available item. "Why not skates?" cried a young voice. Terrific idea! So began a bucket brigade of pails of water. Soon there was a long strip of ice that almost reached the far wall. Skates appeared and everyone had a turn. It worked well as long as you stopped in time to avoid crashing into the brick wall or wrapping yourself around the steel posts that supported the wooden walkway that ran the

length of the building.

My earliest memories were when the hill was home to the Merritton Lawn Bowling Club. It was a beautiful sight during the day when a tournament was held and there would be a host of many players. The emerald coloured grass was as smooth as silk. The ladies and men dressed in their sparkling whites, holding matching white cloths to keep the bowls clean. There were the well dressed spectators lining the perimeter cheering on their favourites. A gentle click could be heard as the bowls nudged each other for scoring position, followed by a low murmur of approval or a muted expletive when it rolled in the wrong direction. If the wave existed then there

is no doubt it would have been used, but in a more gentle manner. At night it was even more picturesque. The length of overhead lights revealed a postcard scene worthy of an oil painting. The green grass was even greener and seemed to glow in its colour.

But the bowling club moved on, giving in no doubt to the ravages of summer and winter sport. First behind the library and then beside Merritton High School where it remained for years. It became well known for its many excellent bowlers. Sadly the club recently disbanded due to lack of interest.

The overhead string of lights remained for years before giving into rust and taken down. We were glad, because they were in the way of our long touchdown bombs. Little other evidence remains of its existence.

There is though a curious little concrete bench built into the wall at ground level. Perhaps this was a spot for an official scorer who would rule on the games.

Occasionally I drive by and now at any time of the year it is almost deserted. No longer is it covered in kids enjoying the outdoors and fresh air. No longer are happy squeals of delight and laughter heard. And no longer are there the murmurs and the gentle click of the bowls. Like Grannies' pond and the giant steam trains that howled through town, it has been relegated to one of the long lost memories of Merritton.



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# Merritton Postcards

We have created a new postcard for the Merritton area which shows the award-winning heritage bins. Our postcard shows the heritage bins for which we won the Community Blooms Community Corner award but admittedly, it's not the community's first postcard. Our card demonstrates a return to publicly celebrating the features of our fine community. We've included two historic postcards here. You'll have to go to St. Catharines City Hall, the St. Catharines Museum at Lock 3 or Bloomin' Busy on Hartzel Road to see our new one!



The train station shown here, circa 1925, was the subject of a colour postcard published by F.H. Leslie. Photo courtesy of Niagara Falls Library



This postcard of the railway bridge over the old canal is one that was actually mailed and has a fascinating message on the reverse side. It reads "they had sent a man down on Saturday and I wasn't sorry for it rained all day. I have got to go to a place called Merritton ? in the morning. Will be there all day. I suppose you will be taking in the dance on Monday night. Hope you have a good time" Photo courtesy of Niagara Falls Library

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# He's Considered the Man of the Century

In August, when you saw that there was to be an upcoming article entitled 'Man of the Century', did you wonder who it would be about? Did you think maybe it might be Dunc Schooley or Pic Leeson or Trapper Leo? Or maybe Jack MacNaughton or George Hostick or Bill Wiley or Ted Collins? Perhaps you thought it could be about another one of the many people who have influenced our development. All of those people would be excellent candidates for man of the 20th century, although it would be hoped that any new title would be given a more gender sensitive title of 'Person of the Century'. In fact this article is about someone from the 19th century and contains information that appeared in one of our anniversary books.

William Clark, considered Merritton's Man of the Century, was a person who felt a keen obligation to the residents of his community. Born in 1854 into a family that lived in a house just behind where the Hayes Steel yard was located on Oakdale, he went to school at the north end of Hartzel Road near Queenston Street with his four sisters and four brothers. Richard had a remarkable record of work and service performed for the community. He took over the position of Merritton Village Clerk after Gilbert Schooley died in 1885. Before this he had worked in the cotton mill, the Smythe flour mill and operated his own bakery. During 1885 he was also appointed secretary of the school board, a position that he held until 1942. During his work with the school board, he oversaw much growth including the building of Central School in 1893 and a 'Kindergarten School' built at the corner of Merritt and Glendale in 1920 as well as the operation of a school on Smythe Street. He was also involved in the 1924 building of a new school on Maple Street and Merritton High's construction in 1934.



In 1887 he became the secretary of the Waterworks Commission, a position he held until 1919 and then again from 1937 to 1943. He was also Superintendent during much of this time, making the water main maintenance and filter plant operation under his direction. As works superintendent, he supervised and approved the constructions and repairs. It is interesting to note that he had the great idea of getting stone dust from the quarries for use on roads.

He became the first chief of the volunteer fire department in 1888 and served until 1942. The drill team that he organized was famous throughout Canada and Merritton had the first motorized fire truck in the Niagara peninsula.

In 1898 he organized and was the Niagara District Firemen's Association first president. He was active at his church, St. James Anglican, and was chair of the building committee in 1892.

Richard and his wife Elizabeth had two children, Frank and Anna and lived on Queenston Street, right where Hartzel Road turns into Queenston. Richard himself died in 1944, leaving behind a wonderful legacy of service to his community. He lived his entire life in Merritton, planning for the future of our community and contributing with diligence and integrity.

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# Labour Day Weekend 2009

George Hostick's hard working parade committee met recently to start their preparations for the 2009 Lions parade and carnival. We need to recognize these people for all the work they do in continuing to preserve the weekend festivities. Voting members include George, Jeff White and Bob Flynn from the Merritton Lions. The following voting members represent other organizations including the Legion which is represented by Jack Gemmell, the M.A.A. sends Terry Barclay, Mark Roy is there from the CAW, Mike Coakley represents union organization, and City Council is represented by our councilors Jeff Burch and Jenny Stevens. The Merritton Community Group is represented by Morag Engright.

Discussed at the most recent meeting was the preferred choice for the parade route, namely either the current route that starts on Bunting and moves down Hartzel or the traditional route which starts from Pen Centre. The Merritton Community Group made a passionate case at the meeting in favour of the Pen Centre Route which goes down Merritt St. over the new bridge and through what is commonly recognized as the Heritage District of the old town of Merritton. Although the MCG does prefer the old route, there are advantages to the old and new routes. There has also been considerable discussion in the community about the choice of route with people weighing favourably on both sides. When the final destination of the route is established, residents should feel reassured that the topic has been discussed in depth and that the decision wouldn't be made lightly.

There is strong agreement that the parade is the heart of the Community Days celebration no matter which route is chosen. At the parade meeting, it was suggested that the Heritage District could become more involved in the celebration by staging special events in the area over the course of the weekend, such as a street party around the Legion and Chestnut Street in the heart of the District with floats and decorations to commemorate some of the old time businesses that formed the core of the Town.

We know that the traditional weekend is pretty festive but it could even include fireworks in 2009. Committee member Mike Coakley will look into the use of fireworks during the Merritton Lions carnival weekend. It could happen on Sunday with Monday being the rain day, although plans are still being worked out. Mike will be actively raising funds for this event if it goes ahead and some qualified pyrotechnical people have already volunteered their services.

## How Does Your Garden Grow?



A new community garden was approved for Centennial Park on Oakdale Avenue near Eastchester in an area of the park scouted out by City Parks and Recreation staff. Vegetables will be grown for the Community Care food bank in one half of the site, leaving the remaining spots available for individual gardeners. Jane Hanlon of St. Catharines Climate Action Now has led this inspiring project. On Saturday, November 1st participants dumped compost donated by Walker Industries in wheelbarrows to start getting the plots ready for the spring.

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## Connaught's Impressive Tribute

We're impressed with the energy and enthusiasm displayed by staff and students at Connaught School for the project honouring our own war hero, Air Commodore Leonard Birchall. Risto Liipere, a teacher at the school, was part of Jim Lawrason's committee from its inception and helped coordinate the school's participation. He created a resource package of read-alouds, background informational material and videos that teachers used to help students learn more about the concept of heroes. The students found heroes in their own lives as well as in the world around them in addition to learning about Len Birchall himself. The Heroes project was incorporated into Connaught's first-ever Historica Fair run by Scott Young, a Grade 7 teacher at the school. Participation in Historica gave students a real-life experience to display their literacy and research skills in presentations for peers and the public. After presentations at the school, Connaught students' projects were then displayed at the District School Board of Niagara office on Carlton Street. Sharon Chandler (Len's daughter) and Ellis Landale, retired military (Len's nephew) were keynote speakers for board-wide Historica participants.

While the students were learning more, the Birchall commemoration project was taking shape with community partner involvement in supplying materials, sometimes at cost or free with donated labour. The Birchall Memorial Circle looked splendid with a donated flagpole by the Chandler family, a plaque, landscaping greenery installed by Joe Merkies and Kernahan Park students and stonework, both interlocking brick and armour stones donated by two local landscapers. The October 3rd program involved many military and political dignitaries in the gymnasium assembly with guests and students from Grades 4 - 8. After this, everyone moved outside to hear the school choir and selected readings by students interspersed with speeches and the laying of the commemorative wreath complete with the playing of Taps and Reveille.

All students were presented with "zipper pulls", with appropriate maple leaf and poppy, donated by the Veterans Affairs in Ottawa and adult guests received Leonard Birchall commemorative buttons. The school library has been re-named the Leonard Birchall Memorial Library, complete with a new nameplate on the door. Large plaques of Birchall and the active participants in the greening of the school will be hung in the front foyer of the school.



### BIRCHALL PHOTO MEMORIES

There is now a wonderful opportunity to order 8 X 12" prints taken by professional photographer Denis Cahill from the air on the special day honouring Len Birchall. Six photos are available and one is shown above. Minimum order is for 4 and each picture is \$10. Pictures include:

- Collegiate student forming the letters POW
- students, staff and guests standing at Connaught's Birchall Circle
- the Birchall plaque
- a distant shot of Connaught School
- the flyby aircrafts - Canso (Catalina) or Harvard

The revenue from the sale of these pictures will help fund the remaining Commemoration Day expenses. Please call or email orders to Jim Lawrason at 905 646-0851 or [jlawrason@cogeco.ca](mailto:jlawrason@cogeco.ca) or contact [merrittonmatters@hotmail.com](mailto:merrittonmatters@hotmail.com).



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# The Evolving of a Neighborhood

By Phyllis Thomson

If you were to take a drive to the foot of Burleigh Hill and turn right onto Warkdale, you may be surprised to find a relatively unknown and unheralded little area of modest bungalows sitting there between Burleigh Hill and Highway 406. The homes were built in 1960 and, at the time, were mostly inhabited by young families whose children attended either Burleigh Hill or St. Patrick's school, both of which were ideally located a stone's throw away.

It's hard to imagine that the land these houses sit on was once a dairy farm. Francis Wark bought the land in 1920 after returning from World War I and it consisted of one hundred acres which extended all the way from St. Davids Road, down the escarpment to Glendale Avenue (which was then Boyle Road) to the Burleigh Hill area on the east and well past the 406 on the west. Of course, neither Burleigh Hill nor Highway 406 existed as such at that time. It would be the mid-50's before a road was cut up through the escarpment

which became known as Burleigh Hill, and years later until the 406 was constructed. The only route to the Wark's homestead back then, was via a little dirt road that led from Boyle Road (Glendale) to the bottom of the escarpment where the house and barns sat. I was surprised to learn that this area has been, at one time, Grantham, Merritton, and now St. Catharines. The farm land was sold in 1956 and Francis and his wife Doris retired from farming but remained in their home. Their son, Don, worked on the farm alongside his father and he and his wife Sylvia built a house near the old farm house in 1950 where they raised their five children and where Don and Sylvia still reside close to sixty years later. Their daughter, Marilyn (Wark) and her husband Art Buchanan, also built a home close by on Rockdale Ave. in 1955 where their three children were born and in which Marilyn and Art still live. What interesting memories they must all have of watching roads and houses being constructed on what was once their farm land. I visited Don and Sylvia recently and spent an enjoyable afternoon listening to fascinating stories of the history of the farm and the area – and who better to tell it than people who have lived through it. Don and Sylvia both went to Merritton High School, as did four of their children and two of their sons have chosen to follow in their father's and grandfather's footsteps and now have farms of their own. Marilyn also attended Merritton High School, as did her three children. The big white farm house where Don and Marilyn's parents lived all those years, still stands on a little rise of land overlooking Rockdale Ave. and, although Francis and his wife are no longer living, I'm sure they would be happy to know that one of their granddaughters and her family has chosen to live there.

We moved to Rockdale Ave. in 1962 when the houses were new and people were still settling in. I drove around there last spring and found it to be the same pretty little street I remembered, but the tiny wispy trees that were planted along the roadside so many years ago had blossomed into majestic giants, looking very stately as they provided abundant shade all along the street.

There are only four short streets in this little subdivision – Warkdale, Hilldale, Rockdale and Clearview and a total of thirty-six houses were built there in 1960 when the new subdivision was established. Living there, we had the best of both worlds with the Pen Centre within walking distance, the elementary schools close by and the Escarpment literally in our backyard (or front yard as the case was) and every year we were treated to the beauty of the changing seasons, from the lush

green leaves in the Spring, the brilliant coloured leaves in the Fall, to the snow laden boughs of the winter. I recall it as a friendly little area – it wasn't hard to get to know your neighbours as there were so few of them. The family who lived next door to us still lives there, as do quite a few others, but many have moved on, as we did. Our next door neighbours came to Canada from Norway and they loved the wintertime, so it wasn't unusual, after a snowfall, to see them put on their skis and come flying down the escarpment, ending up almost in their own front



THE WARK HOMESTEAD TODAY

yard! I don't recall that we had a lot of exciting things happening back then, but I do remember one snowy night, a car coming down Burleigh Hill leaped up over the guard rail and down the embankment, landing relatively unscathed in our neighbour's side yard.

We watched the children of the neighbourhood grow up and many went to Merritton High School. It was a long trek for them – no school bus stopping at our front door to transport them to their destination! I didn't know until recently (and just as well!) that my daughter and her friends had found a short cut whereby they crossed Glendale, and walked along the railway tracks, emerging near the old Hayes Steel factory on Oakdale which was just minutes away from the high school. Apparently they took this route home after basketball games or other evening school activities as well. Today it would not even be an option to let your children do that, but the world being a bit different in those times, they were always quite safe.

There have been a few larger homes added to the area since 1960, but basically it has retained its small neighbourhood status with only one road serving both in and out traffic to/from Burleigh Hill Drive which seems to have worked pretty well for many years. But no neighbourhood is totally perfect. I'm sure there have been some challenges over the years and I witnessed one on my recent visit to the area. St. Marguerite French Speaking School, which replaced St. Patrick's School in 1989, and the adjoining Day Care Centre, appears to have grown in popularity and population and with that has come the inevitable traffic problems as cars arrive to pick up or deliver the children and have few places to park except along the narrow street leading in and out of Burleigh Hill which, in turn, leads to a very congested area at peak school times. And I understand that there is now a proposal to build several townhouses at the end of Warkdale which is cause for concern for the residents and, having lived there myself, I can understand their consternation. But, from my point of view, this has always been and remains a unique little community.



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