

# Wellington County History



**Fergus Highland Games**  
**Historic Interiors of Wellington County**  
**Swimming in Eramosa Township**  
**The Guelph Cup: 300 Million Sold Worldwide**  
**The Tragic Tale of Two Fiddlers**  
**Swimmer Shirley Campbell: *The Fergus Flash***  
**Wellington County sports photo-feature**

## **PATRONS 2005**

The late Jean F. (Mrs. Thos. J.) Hutchinson, Fergus  
Estate of Lillian Rae Benson, London  
Estate of Grace C. Black, Fergus  
Estate of Arthur Brecken, Erin

Marjorie Durnford, Guelph  
John Carter, Fergus  
Janet Hassan, Guelph  
Mary MacNamara, Fergus  
James Gow, Fergus  
Blaine Barry, Guelph  
Dr. B.R. Christie, Stratford, PEI  
David M. Beattie, Fergus

**Highland Pines Campground Ltd.**, Belwood  
*Since 1966*

**The Ostic Group**, Fergus  
*Your partner in financial security since 1926*

**Husky Farm Equipment**, Alma

**Fergus-Elora News Express**  
*A part of your community since 1852*

**The Sleeman Brewing and Malting Co. Ltd.**, Guelph  
*Established 1834*

**The Murray Group**, Moorefield

**Ecclestone Financial Group**, Fergus

and the

**CORPORATION OF THE COUNTY OF WELLINGTON**

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Etna Leffler at the piano, 29 May 1909 [Clifford?].  
Photo: WCMA ph 8299.

# Historic Interiors of Wellington County

*by Cindy Clow Danton*

The County of Wellington was first permanently settled in the early 1830s by emigrants from the British Isles, as well as a few Germans, Pennsylvania Germans and United Empire Loyalists. The Loyalists introduced the simple Georgian house style to Upper Canada, with its emphasis on symmetry and harmony, while the Pennsylvania Germans contributed the type of log construction.

Each European group contributed a long and unique tradition of interior arrangements of rooms and their furnishings. Although everyone's house might have looked similar on the exterior, at least the interior offered the new settler the chance to recreate the feeling of his homeland.

Due to the fact that Wellington County, along with the rest of what is now Southern Ontario, evolved from the primitive backwoods to Victorian elegance within the space of four decades, it is almost impossible to discuss the development of its houses within a strict chronological or stylistic framework. Instead, I will attempt to describe the flow of house types, from log shanty to Edwardian home, which spanned the period from the 1830s to approximately 1920.

It is important to remember that, even within this tentative framework, there were exceptions. The house types adopted by the incoming settlers varied with the social class and financial ability of the owners, and building materials locally available. Some people, especially the 2% of the emigrants who travelled to Upper Canada cabin class,<sup>1</sup> never lived in log shanties or even the one room log houses, while other groups, especially the poor, spent decades living in the same shanty constructed on their arrival. Towns, owing to more diverse populations and better transportation, attracted varied building materials and skilled tradesmen earlier than the rural areas (much of North Wellington County was settled late), and consequently produced finer homes at an earlier date.

## **The Shanty (Settlement Period)**

The initial dwelling built by the average settler upon taking up his land was some type of temporary shanty. No depictions of interiors exist for this type of dwelling within Ontario, although there are a number of contemporary descriptions.



Figure 1: Interior, weaver's cottage, Isle of Islay, ca.1772.

Probably the closest approximation to the early shanty is this interior view of a late 18th Century weaver's hut in the Hebrides Islands (Figure 1). As you can see, roofs were low, quarters cramped and families large. Cooking was done in a pot suspended over a central fire; furniture was meagre and crudely made; the floor was of earth and there were no windows.

Thomas Need's description of his bachelor shanty in the Sturgeon Lake area in 1838 sounds a little more comfortable:

"The next few days were occupied in building a shanty, or rude hut... It consisted of one apartment, 14 feet by 12 feet in the clear, and contained in the way of furniture a camp bedstead, a chest of drawers, and a well-filled bookcase; it also had the somewhat unusual luxury of a chimney, pegs for the suspension of guns and fishing implements, and shelves for my scanty kitchen utensils: a hole in the planks served to admit light, and air found free entrance through numberless cracks and crevices."<sup>2</sup>

In addition to excess air and smoke, settlers often had to contend with a leaky roof, as Mrs. Cook describes her Queen's Bush shanty in the 1850s:

"... this [bark] roof leaked so badly that when it rained my husband had to hold an umbrella over us when we were in bed."<sup>3</sup>

Small wonder that the early settlers considered the shanty as a temporary dwelling, to be abandoned for a more comfortable log house as soon as possible.

### **The First House (Settlement Period)**

The usual second dwelling of the settler was the 1½ storey, 1 room log house, regulated in its construction and design by government settlement duties. Generally these houses were erected by the settler with assistance from neighbours, or if finances allowed, by a professional tradesman.

Several contemporary descriptions exist of interiors of the "First House" in Ontario, but no visual record survives. However, a close approximation is the interior of a cottage on Skye in the Hebrides Islands (Figure 2).

Mr. George Elmslie describes life in a one room log house in the predominantly Scottish Bon Accord settlement during the 1830s:

"Towards the end of December we got into our new lodgings - the building provided for us being now roofed and chinked, the doorway hung, and the windows in and glazed - things which did not always happen simultaneously in those days. Our beds were arranged in this wise: at about seven feet from the western gable a strong beam was fastened from side to side: this was divided into three compartments by white cotton screens; then boards were placed across, and on these were laid mattresses and beds. This was one common bedroom, partitioned off by a white sheet extending from side to side. Our cooking stove was placed towards the other end, and in the centre our common table, formed of the large chests, trunks and smaller boxes were our seats."<sup>4</sup>

One element in this description particularly corresponds to the Scottish interior illustrated (Figure 2), notably the use of a partition to form a separate bedroom. The trunks and sheet were probably brought from Scotland by the emigrants.

In a letter home to Scotland, A.D. Fordyce describes life in the Valentine house near Fergus in 1835:

"I have not yet got my bed up from the Village, so I have just put my Feather Bed [mattress] under Mr. Valentine's, and I suppose I have as snug a berth as is in the house. Since the cold weather commenced we do not use Sheets, but just turn in amongst the blankets. The house, you might suppose, would not be very warm from having no partitions, but we keep on roaring fires, so that we don't feel cold. We have no chimney built, but just a hole cut in the roof, and the place about it boarded up as you see in the Farm Houses at home, where the Fire is on the hearth as with us ... It is Scons we bake, but not like the Flour Scons at home. No, No; they would not be substantial enough for us. We make them as thick, sometimes thicker than your soft biscuits; and fire them in a Bachelor's Oven. Till that very usefull article was got, the Frying Pan supplied its place. But the Frying Pans here are not the same as yours [griddles?]. The handles are three Feet long, on account of the large wood Fires we keep ... when we have to roast Beef or Pork, etc., it is done in a Bake



Figure 2: Interior of Skye cottage.

Kettle, which is a large Pot [into which the meat is put] with a Lid, on the top of which live ashes are strewd. The machine is then set before the Fire and the operation goes on very fast"<sup>5</sup>

Compare this description with the Scottish interior pictured (Figure 2) - the central hearth, which was the focus of the Scottish and Irish home, the smoke ascending to a hole in the roof. All cooking was done over the open fire.

Generally, in the first house, the floors were of unpainted wood and the walls were often left as bare logs. Besides the small pieces of furniture and household effects which the average settler was able to bring with him - trunks, bedding, kitchen utensils, perhaps a small spinning wheel - the first house would be furnished with other items made locally, much of it hand- made by the family. A ladder-back chair now in the Wellington County Museum was hand-made in Erin Township in 1838. It bears a strong resemblance to the traditional Irish chair, its low height corresponding to the common necessity of keeping below the smoke level in a house with an open hearth.

Although considerably more comfortable than the shanty, I am sure most families were more than ready to leave behind the spartan first house for their second house, when finances permitted. After all, their primary purpose in emigrating was to improve their physical surroundings, not to remain at the traditional level of their homeland.

### **The Second House (Mid 19th Century)**

The second house was generally constructed when the family had reached a level prosperous enough to be able to afford it. The building material varied,

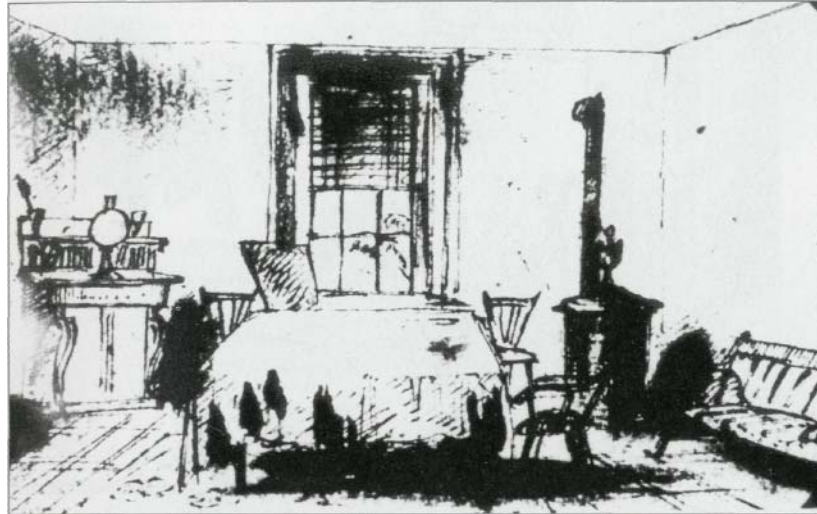


Figure 3: Interior, parlour, Fergus, ca.1858. Sketch by C.D. Brown

according to financial ability and taste of the family, from log or frame to the more costly brick or stone. Obviously, the availability of skilled tradesmen would also affect their decision. In general, these homes were one and one half storeys, although two storey dwellings appear in towns, and were divided into several rooms on both floors. Usually a cellar was excavated. The primitive hearth was replaced by a fireplace or even a stove. This is the first house about which we can really use the term 'interior decoration'.

Two drawings of Wellington County interiors survive from this period, sketched by C.D. Brown, an English artist, about 1858. An unidentified Fergus parlour (Figure 3) is furnished with a parlour stove, finely crafted furniture, window blinds and what appears to be carpeting on the floor. An unidentified Guelph bedroom (Figure 4) also features elegant furniture and carpeting on the floor.

Local newspaper advertisements for the period often mention blinds, but rarely curtains, suggesting that blinds were the norm. W. Kievell, an Flora stationer, offered 'window blinds' for sale in the 1854 *Fergus Freeholder*,<sup>6</sup> while Charles Clarke of Flora, in a diary entry for 1865, states that "Mother is making window blinds for my bedroom."<sup>7</sup>, suggesting that both home-made and commercial products were in use. In 1866, William Sunter of Eramosa Township recorded in his journal, "I bought 3 window blinds and a candle stick which nearly made the 500."<sup>8</sup>

Several local weavers were able to provide hand-woven bed furnishings during this period. Puslinch Township, in 1848, boasted a "WEAVING FACTORY ...four Looms in operation, one of which will be fitted up for the purpose of Weaving Bed Covers Full Breadth; ... DAVID McFARLANE."<sup>9</sup>

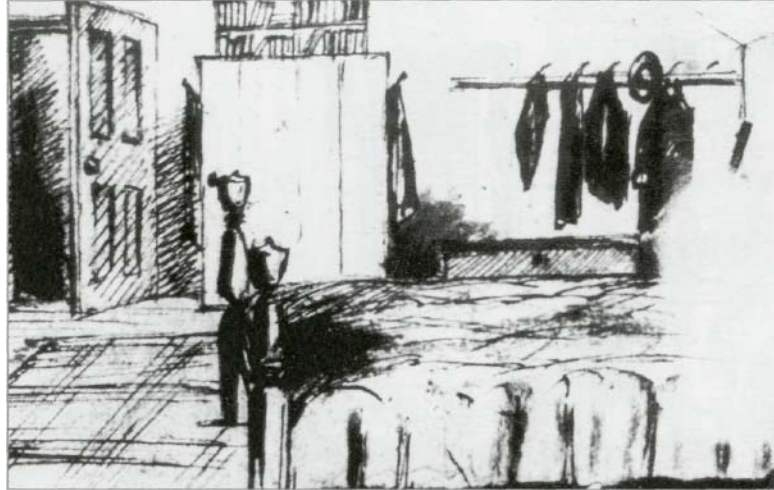


Figure 4: Interior, bedroom, Guelph, ca.1858. Sketch by C.D. Brown

while "THEODORE FENWICK (from the North of Scotland) ... commenced business in the weaving of Winceys, Blankets, Satinetsts, Serges, Flannels, and Linens" in Elora in 1860.<sup>10</sup>

Did the professional local weavers also provide carpets during this period, or was it strictly a home product? William Sunter's diary entry for March 22, 1866 suggests: "Mrs. Nelson (the tailor's wife) gave me a present for Margaret of a bag of clippings for making rugs."<sup>11</sup> Certainly the first documented references to locally made carpets appear in the 1870s newspapers.<sup>12</sup>

As early as the 1840s, carpeting was also being imported. Thomas Heffernan's advertisement in the 1847 *Guelph and Gait Advertiser* offered "WOOLLEN AND COTTON GOODS, Direct from the home Manufacturers in England ... 60 pairs of Blankets, some of very superior quality ... 6 pieces Kidderminster Carpeting. 4 pieces Brussels ditto."<sup>13</sup>

An auction sale of the household effects of Mr. Robert Ranson, Guelph, held in 1848, lists the following items: "Parlour and Kitchen Chairs, Tables, 1 Feather Bed, Blankets, Sheets, Coverlids, some superior Table Linen; 1 four-post Bedstead with Moreen Hangings; Kidderminster Carpeting; Settee; Chefonier, Crockery; Knives and Forks; Brass Fender; 1 Parlour Stove; Clock ..."<sup>14</sup> Certainly most of the furniture listed could have been locally produced, for by mid-century a number of professional cabinetmakers and chair makers were established in the southern part of Wellington County, producing a wide variety of furniture.<sup>15</sup> John Ross of Guelph offered for sale in 1852 the rather exotic sounding "Improved Patent Bedstead ... easily formed into a Rocking chair, or a cradle."<sup>16</sup> A painted brown settle bench, very similar in design although more elaborately carved than the one in Figure 3 is now in the Wellington County



Figure 5: Interior, parlour, George Sleeman house, Guelph, ca.1905.

Photo: Guelph Museums 976.40.54.

Museum. It was made for the Jackson family, Scotch Block, Guelph Township.

The walls of the second house were generally plastered, then whitewashed regularly. The plaster helped insulate the house, while the whitewash helped stem the tide of insect invaders that particularly plagued a log house. The whiting was often tinted a pastel shade, with blue the preferred colour. In 1847, J.H. Morris, a Guelph merchant, advertized "DYE STUFFS, CHIP LOGWOOD, Extract of ditto, Madder, Redwood, Nicaragua, Fustic, Camwood, Indigo, Archill, Annatto, Cochineal, Quecitra, Shumac, Tureneric' Nutgalle, Brazil, Cudbear, Alum, Copperas, Blue Vitriol, etc."<sup>17</sup> Samples of blue-tinted whiting, used in the Cassin House, Puslinch Township in the mid-1850s, are now in the Wellington County Museum.

Woodwork, including the floor, was generally painted; grey, reddish-brown, yellow ochre, green and blue occur with great frequency.<sup>18</sup> J.H. Morris in 1847 advertized a dazzling array of colours:

"PAINTS AND COLOURS . GROUND  
 WHITE LEAD, NO. 1,2,3 &4.  
 DRY " "  
 RED AND ORANGE "  
 Venetian Red, Spanish Brown, Yellow Ochre,  
 Lytharge, Turkey and English Umber, Camp,  
 Blue, and Ivory Blacks, Red and White

Chalk, Prussian, Verditer, and Wet Blue,  
Brunswick, Paris and Chrome Green, Drop  
and Madder Lake, Pipe Clay, Rose and Dutch  
Pink, Putty, Indian Red, Strewing Smalts,  
Terra de lienna, Chinese Vermillion, Verdi-  
gris, Whiting, King's and Chrome Yellow." <sup>19</sup>

Occasionally we find a painted decoration, such as a ceiling stencil of stylized flowers in the James Orme House, Puslinch Township, ca. 1854, which appears to be hand done.

Wallpaper appears infrequently in the second house, probably only in the parlour. It was still a luxury item. The first reference to appear in local newspapers is not until 1852,<sup>20</sup> when WJ. Brown of Guelph advertised "PAPER HANGINGS FOR THE MILLION!! I HAVE now on hand and for sale - 2,000 PIECES ROOM PAPER, Assorted Patterns ..." <sup>21</sup> English wallpapers were supplied in lengths, called 'pieces', of 12 yards, approximately 22" wide. Three examples of early wallpaper, found in the Thomas Pritchard house near Fergus, now in the Wellington County Museum, show the small-scale simple geometric patterns and often vivid colours favoured in the earlier room papers.

### **Victorian (1870s-1890s)**

As we enter the late Victorian era, the interiors of Wellington County merge with styles emanating from abroad. The important difference was that, in North America, such elaborate homes were available to the middle and even labouring classes who were willing to work for them. In Europe, they were traditionally the exclusive province of the upper class. The Victorian era was the great equalizer that witnessed the birth of the 'nouveau riche,' with all of their tendencies toward over-decoration. Despite such tendencies, some very fine examples of Victorian craftsmanship did emerge, such as the George Sleeman house in Guelph.

The interior of a parlour in the Sleeman house (Figure 5) exhibits some of the lavish attention to detail which was applied to this Victorian showplace. Note the Victorian tendency to cover and drape surfaces, the fine floral printed carpeting, the fringed table cover and the portieres. The scale of the patterns has now grown enormous. The carving on the side table which is barely visible on the right hand side of the photograph bears a strong resemblance to a sideboard still found in the house.

An inventory of a parlour taken in Fergus in 1888 illustrates the many items necessary to furnish a parlour tastefully:

"1 carpet, 1 Hair Cloth Set 7 pieces, 1 Patent Rocker, 1 Centre Table, 1 small Stand, 1 fancy table. 1 fancy chair, 1 whatnot, 1 work basket, 1 wax cross & Globe, 3 worked flat wool framed pictures, 3 brackets, 1 Ottoman and 1 foot stool, 2 cushions, 1 nitting in wool and globe, 13 pictures, 3 pair Curtains & cornishes." <sup>22</sup>

The improvements in transportation and in production methods revolutionized all areas of interior decoration. Many of the goods from local tradesmen were replaced by mass-produced items from Canada, the United States and abroad. In 1872, E. Phelan of Fergus advertised that he:

"Would remind the public that as he gets his supplies, Furniture shipped by Railway, direct from the Manufactories to Fergus, he is now in a position to sell on better terms than when he had to team it from Guelph. An extensive stock kept constantly on hand, embracing all kinds of Furniture required in private or public buildings for kitchen or parlor, cottage or palace ..."<sup>23</sup>

Also in that year, James Hazelton's Cabinet and Chair Establishment, Guelph, advertised "warerooms 210 feet long," handling custom-made as well as ready-made furniture.<sup>24</sup>

Window blinds and curtains were used together during the late Victorian period. The Sleeman house in Guelph used interior shutters, blinds and curtains on some of its windows.<sup>25</sup> In 1872, Henry Michie of Fergus advertised "Damask and Lace Curtains ... Window Blinds"<sup>26</sup> while in 1875, R. Chinneck, an Elora stationer, offered "Window Blind Paper, Plain, Figured, and satin finished"<sup>27</sup> for sale, suggesting a home-made version. Mary Leslie's description of a house in Erin Village in 1878 includes "green paper blinds,"<sup>28</sup> while in 1892, Burrows Bros., Guelph advertised "Chenille and Lace Curtains ... a full line of Window Shades in the latest Colors and designs."<sup>29</sup>

Carpet manufacturing seemed to develop in the 1870s, with a large local production as well as importations from abroad. In 1872, Henry Michie of Fergus offered:

"THE CARPET ROOMS INVITING! Therein will be found a beautiful display of Tapestry, 2 and 3 ply wool, Union and Hemp Carpetings, Druggeting"<sup>30</sup>

Many local weavers advertised rag-carpet weaving. In 1876, Mr. Peter Jeffrey of Elora offered "RAG-CARPET WEAVING ... being done with farmers' work, is ready to receive orders for weaving of all kinds of rag carpets,"<sup>31</sup> suggesting the semi-professional nature of the work. A length of rag carpeting now in the Wellington County Museum was woven by the McLean sisters of Erin Township for the Near family at about this date.

The first reference to the Elora Carpet Company appears in the 1870s,<sup>32</sup> and in 1875, Charles Clarke of Elora advertised "Elora and English Carpets in all Wool, Union Felts, etc."<sup>33</sup>

Oil cloths begin to appear during the 1880s. Charles Clarke of Elora advertised in 1882 "A large lot of English goods will be received in a few days, including Floor Oil Cloths,"<sup>34</sup> and a house in Fergus used an oilcloth in the kitchen in 1888.<sup>35</sup> A green and gold floor oilcloth, with an all-over large scale



Figure 6: Interior, corner of informal sitting room, L.H. Yeomans' house, Mount Forest. Photo: WCMA, ph 1839

floral design dating to this period, is now in the Wellington County Museum.

Plastering and painting of walls and woodwork during the late Victorian era was left to the professionals and grew exceedingly elaborate. In 1872, Beams and Son of Fergus offered their skills in "Plain and Ornamental Plastering, Paper Hanging, Whitewashing, etc." <sup>36</sup> while S. Nelson of Fergus was prepared to undertake "House Painting ... Gilding, Fresco Painting, Decorating, Paperhanging ... Glazing, etc., etc." <sup>37</sup>

By the late Victorian era, mass production methods had brought wallpaper within the reach of the bulk of the population. Very large-scale, all-over floral patterns in rich colour combinations and heavy textures were favoured. Sets of papers could be purchased to cover walls, borders and ceilings with variations of the same design.

In 1872, Day's Bookstore, Guelph, offered "ENGLISH PAPERS" for sale, <sup>38</sup> while in 1877, Charles Clarke of Elora advertised "a large stock of good goods - English, Canadian and American - from which the most fastidious can make choices. Low prices, but no Rubbish!" <sup>39</sup>

Day's advertisement for 1884 offered "the latest and choicest American Papers for Parlors, Halls, Dining Rooms with borders to match - also Ceiling Decorations," <sup>40</sup> and Phillips Drug and Book Store in Fergus featured "A SPLENDID VARIETY of American and Canadian Wall and Ceiling Papers - Plain and Gilt - with beautiful corners and Borders to match" <sup>41</sup> in 1891.

### **Edwardian (ca. 1900-1919)**

With the Edwardian era, we enter the twentieth century, with all of its emphasis on efficiency, bareness and restraint. The advent of electricity had the effect of

lightening the heavily draped Victorian interiors. Colours grew less bold, scale grew smaller and woodwork was often painted white. The whole effect was less formal and more comfortable.

The interior of an informal sitting room in Mount Forest (Figure 6) exhibits the Edwardian sense of lightness and airiness. The simple built-in couch, covered in striped fabric, light wicker furniture and casual arrangement of shelves and pictures all convey a rather homey simplicity.

In contrast to the Victorian passion for ostentatious furnishings, the Edwardians stressed a do-it-yourself approach to interior decoration. Two articles in the *Ladies Home Journal* for 1910, "How I Furnished My Entire Flat From Boxes" and "The Handy Man About the House: Some Clever Things He Can Make at Little Cost" set the tenor of the times. Advice in the same issue includes how to create your own wallpaper border with a cut, paste and paint technique, and how to make a bedspread from an old bedsheet.<sup>42</sup>

A 1912 auction sale in Fergus of John Brownridge's household effects included:

"Doherty organ and stool, range, parlor, cook and wood stove, 2 beds mattresses and springs, extension table, 8 ft., 2 bedroom suites, 21 pictures, sideboard, 6 dining room chairs, 2 rockers, clock, dinner set 97 pieces, fruit set, 1 doz. nappies and bowl, 7 lamps (2 hangers and 2 bracket), 7 small tables, 2 couches, one new upholstered; about 34 yards wool carpet; about 24 yards rag carpet; stair carpet, 15 yards Japanese matting, chest of drawers, one square of linoleum, 2 toilet sets, 2 bedroom chairs, crockinole board, 9 mats, two-section cupboard, 3 kitchen tables (one drop leaf), 6 kitchen chairs, 6 dining room chairs, 3 verandah chairs ... carpet sweeper, mirror."<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps one of the couches was of the latest 'davenport' type,<sup>44</sup> which converted into a bed.

The variety of floor treatments available during this period included ornamental parquet floors and borders,<sup>45</sup> English Axminster, Wilton, velvet and Brussels Carpets, Tapestry Carpets, Union Ingram Carpets, Oriental rugs, Angora Reversible Rugs, Cork Carpet, Hemp Stair Carpets, Passage or Stair Linoleum, Mohair Rugs or Mats, Floor & Stair Oilcloths, English Inlaid Linoleums and Japanese, Fibre & Cocoa Mattings.<sup>46</sup> The ornamental carpets and mats would be shown off to their best advantage against the simple oiled finish recommended for wooden floors.<sup>47</sup>

An olive green and beige woven wool carpet with small scale floral bouquet motifs, now in the Wellington County Museum, was purchased in Elora and used by the Elder family of Peel Township in 1918.

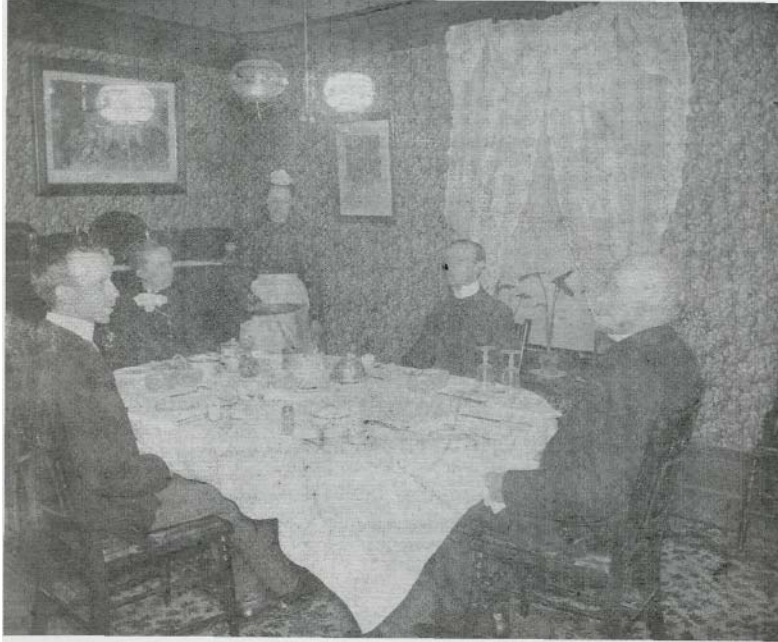
Edwardian window treatments included both blinds and curtains. Window blinds were available in Nottingham, Battenberg and Imitation Cluny Lace,<sup>48</sup> oil-finished and Standard Opaque or Scotch Holland ... in full range of colors.<sup>49</sup>

Window curtains were made of softly draped, lighter weight, often



Interior, from the Reynolds - Farmer family collection, Nichol Twp., ca.1910.

Photo: WCMA ph 18282.



Parlour [Rockwood Hotel?], ca.1890.

Photo: WCMA ph 8319.



Dining room [Rockwood Hotel?], ca.1890.

Photo: WCMA ph 8316.



Interior of Ashenhurst home, Erin Twp., ca.1880. On the wall, top right portrait of Margaret Ashenhurst.

Photo: WCMA ph 14550.



Parlour of John Jeffrey's Gowan Hill farmhouse, Puslinch Twp., Ca.1915. Photo: WCMA ph 9034.

transparent fabrics, in contrast to the weighty dark Victorian velvets and brocades. In 1916, Steele Bros., Fergus, offered "A full stock of dainty Lace Curtains, Nets, Muslins and Scrimms,"<sup>50</sup> while English or American Cretannes, Taffetas, Shadow Cloths, Hand-Blocked Printed Linens and Cottons and ready-made Tapestry curtains were available by mail from Toronto. Portieres (archway and doorway curtains) of French linen velour, Egyptian cloth, Tapestry & silk, Chenille,<sup>51</sup> rope, reed and glass bead were very fashionable.<sup>52</sup> One of a pair of olive green chenille portieres, now in the Wellington County Museum, was used in Nichol Township around 1910. A stylized vegetable motif in beige and tan forms a decorative band at the top edge.

During the Edwardian era, except for the borders, the scale of wallpaper grew very small, favouring screen-effect, floral sprigs,



Thomas Willcocks Saunders with his wife Jamima (nee Wilson), 21  
Yorkshire St., Guelph, ca.1909. Photo: WCMAph 16163.



Jessie Somerville Jeffrey in the dining room of her Gowan Hill farmhouse, Puslinch Twp., ca.1915.

Photo: WCMA ph 9033.



Living room of Elizabeth Innis [nee Shand, 1838-1924], Elora, ca.1880.

Photo: WCMA ph 15145.

stripes, simulated architectural panels, oatmeal, woodgrain-effect and floral stripes. Plain, painted walls were also used. Borders remained large scale, with stylized floral and geometric designs predominating. Sets of wallpaper were available, comprising cut-out or panel upper borders or friezes, lower borders, dado bands and ornaments, giving the wall a neat, sectional appearance. Often matching drapery material was available to complement the wallpaper design.

In 1901, "Glimmers, Gilts and Embossed Gilts ... AMERICAN, ENGLISH, CANADIAN AND JAPANESE WALL PAPERS" were available by mail order from Toronto.<sup>53</sup> R. Phillips of Fergus offered "a full line of Wall Papers of the very latest styles in Greens, Reds and Blues ... Border and Ceiling to match"<sup>54</sup> in 1903, and in 1911, "the latest styles and novelties of American Wall Paper."<sup>55</sup>

Wallpaper samples from the Yeomans house, Mount Forest, now in the Wellington County Museum, depict a stylized large-scale lotus flower border in green, red and gold, with screen-effect body, both on a natural background.

And so, in the space of just over 100 years, the Interiors of Wellington County had moved from rustic log cabin or shanty, through Victorian fussiness, to the beginnings of the Modern Era. It was a trend not dissimilar to the rest of Upper Canada (Southern Ontario), one heavily influenced by three factors: the budget of the homeowners, the materials and craftsmen available and, most particularly, the ethnic background of the homeowners. The County of Wellington remained staunchly British, and somewhat American (Loyalist), in its orientation, and its homeowners have left us a great deal of tangible photographic and artifactual evidence, along with an occasional restored building, such as the Cassin House, now located at the Ontario Agricultural Museum in Milton. The rest of the interiors created by the proud householders of Wellington County must be surmised from surviving remains, now largely in public collections in Ontario.

## ENDNOTES:

- 1 Guillet, E.G., *The Great Migration*, Toronto (1937), 1972, p. 109.
- 2 Need, T., *Six Years in the Bush*, 1838, pp. 58-9.
- 3 "Reminiscences of Mrs. Cook," in Smith, W.L., *Pioneers of Old Ontario*, 1923, p. 261.
- 4 G. Elmslie narrative in Connon, J.R., *The Early History of Elora and Vicinity*, (1930), Waterloo, 1975, p. 75.
- 5 Letter, A.D. Fordyce, Irvineside, near Fergus, to his father in Scotland, Dec. 14, 1835, in A.W. Wright, *Pioneer Days in Nichol*, Mount Forest, 1932, pp. 80-1.
- 6 *Fergus Freeholder*, Dec. 9, 1854.
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- 36 *Fergus News-Record*, March 15, 1872.
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# The Tragic Tale of Two Fiddlers

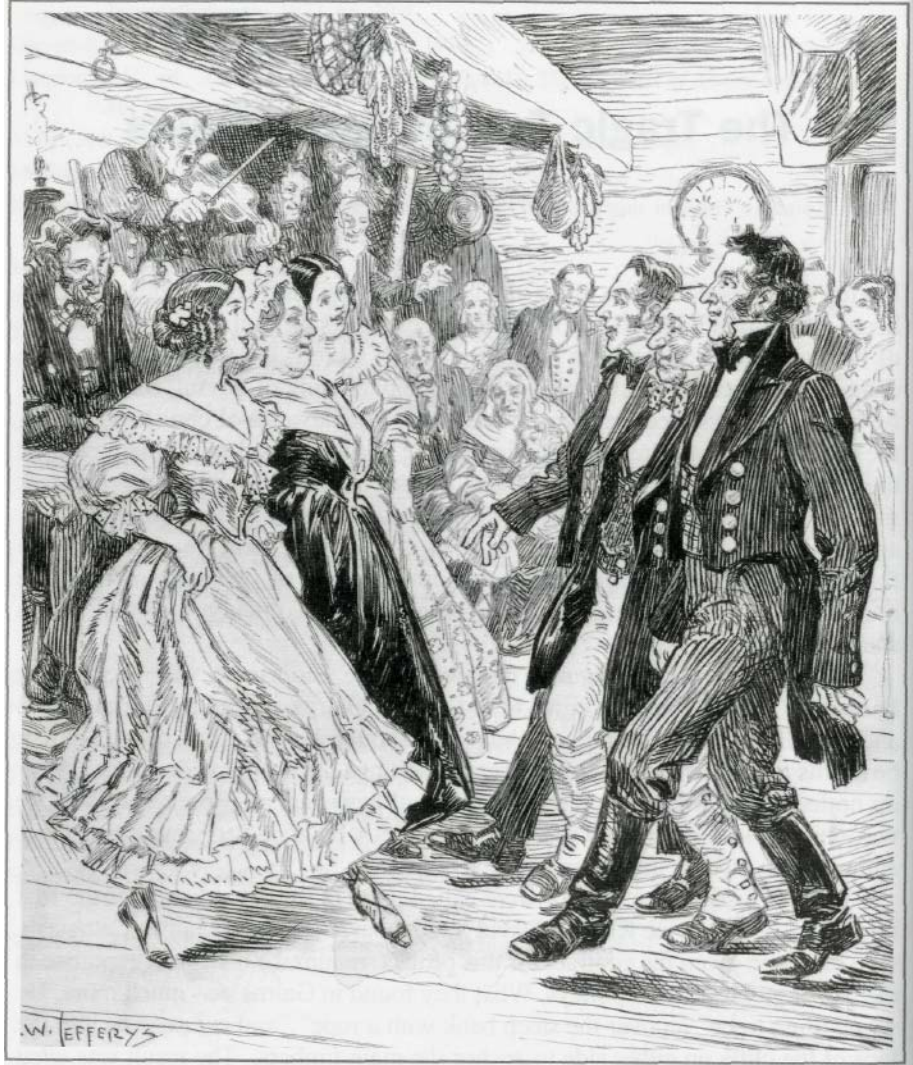
*by Al Koop*

During the backwoods era along the banks of the Grand River, while daylight hours were filled with the crack of the axe, evenings offered the familiar strains of bow on violin. Sometimes called the "devil's box," the fiddle signalled the dismissal of back-breaking drudgery and the beginning of joyful, carefree and, for some, reckless pleasure. By the late 1860s, the advance of civilization along the upper Grand was heralded by the ringing of the railroad-man's hammer and the distant whine of the train's whistle. In the evenings, genteel and pleasant melodies would now escape from bright, new parlours and community halls around the villages and the old fiddlers of the settlement years were soon forgotten. This essay offers a glimpse into the lives of two such men whose musical flames shone brightly for a time and then quickly vanished into a starless night.

One of the more intriguing pioneers in the Elora area was a character known as James "Sailor" Gairns (1804-1872). Gairns arrived in Elora in 1842 and initially made his living as a baker.<sup>1</sup> Although he was known as a fiddler, he seems to have shied away from formal settings for his name does not appear on notices or in articles on the pages of local newspapers. More than likely he was one of those rough and ready entertainers who appealed to working class audiences in taverns and at private house parties.

In 1847 his skills as a sailor were called upon in the construction of the first bridge across the Irvine River at David Street. David Foote and James Cattanach, who had been given the contract for this project, required a man with expertise in the use of guy ropes and pulleys. What they found in Gairns was much more. He was willing to be "let over the steep bank with a rope"<sup>2</sup> and cut notches into the face of the cliffs on either side to anchor the main timbers. The result was what John Connon called the "first cantilever bridge in America."<sup>3</sup> James Gairns acquired these skills (and nerves of steel) during his years as a sailor in the British Navy. He served for several years on a Man-of-War in the Mediterranean and the East Indies and later worked aboard an Atlantic whaler for a year or so before settling in Upper Canada.<sup>4</sup>

Alexander "Sandy" Spalding (1820-1889) came to Upper Canada in 1854, and to the village of Elora in 1855. He was locally celebrated as "a wonderful violin player of Scottish dance music."<sup>5</sup> Spalding made his living at carpentry



"A Village Dance in 1840" by Charles William Jefferys.

Library and Archives Canada C73419

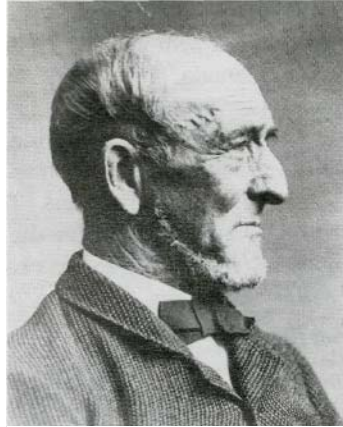
and while also a member of the labouring classes, he gained wider popularity as a musical performer. In 1928, the *Elora Express* touted him as "the best violin player of Scottish dance music that ever came to Canada."<sup>6</sup>

Spalding was fairly well connected in the area. He was a relative of John Taylor (the railroad bridge builder), a schoolmate of David Foote (the first Reeve of Elora), and a regular member of the hot stove circle at Thomas Connon's store.<sup>7</sup> Spalding was also listed as one of the founding members of the Elora Mechanics Institute in 1857.<sup>8</sup> As a carpenter, he worked on the construction of Eraser's Mill and in the summer of 1859 sustained a severe cut on his foot while preparing timber with an adze.<sup>9</sup> His injury did not impede his music career for more than a few weeks, for in late August Spalding and his Quadrille Band played at the Elora Horticultural Society's Fall Show.<sup>10</sup> His reputation as an entertainer soon spread to Fergus and in November Spalding's Quadrille Band played at the Fireman's Ball held at the Fergus Arms Hotel.<sup>11</sup> During the 1860s he became known as the area's leading performer of songs, strathspeys and reels of Scotland.<sup>12</sup>

While there is no clear evidence that Gairns and Spalding ever played music together, their paths must have crossed frequently as both men were local fixtures at taverns, community dances, picnics and other party settings. In a village of less than 1,800 inhabitants they would inevitably have shared the stage on numerous occasions and it seems likely that Gairns sat in with the Quadrille Band from time to time. Also Spalding's son, Andrew, and the old sailor were both members of the 1<sup>st</sup> Elora Volunteer Rifle Company. Andrew Spalding, at the age of 16, became the bugler for the Company<sup>13</sup> and at a grand military picnic held on August 15, 1862, was presented with a fine, new bugle by the Ladies of Elora.<sup>14</sup> After the Fenian Raids, Gairns and 1<sup>st</sup> Elora Volunteer Rifles became part of the 30<sup>th</sup> Battalion and Sandy Spalding joined as a member of the 30<sup>th</sup> Battalion Band.

After his bridge building exploits in the late 1840s, James Gairns was not heard from again for more than a decade. He was still listed as a baker but we know nothing of his social activities, family relations and home life. Then in the 1860s, he re-surfaced as a carpet weaver in Pilkington Township. An advertisement in the *Elora Observer* on June 4, 1861 indicated that he had a shop on Concession 2 near the Guelph Road. The 1867 and 1872 Wellington County Directories listed him as a freeholder on Lot 5, Concession 2.

James Gairns was one of the original members of the 1<sup>st</sup> Elora Volunteer Rifle Company when it was formed in 1861. He marched with the Company in 1866 when it was called out to Chatham in April and then again to Point Edward near Sarnia in June.<sup>15</sup> In both cases the Elora Rifles were away for several weeks and formed close bonds by drilling together during the days and singing around the camp fire in the evenings. No doubt the musicians in the group, including Andrew Spalding and James Gairns, spent these times swapping tunes, songs and stories. As a former member of the British Navy, Gairns was accustomed to facing uncertainty and danger and would have been a mentor of sorts to some of the younger lads. According to his obituary, he



Portrait of Alexander Spalding  
by Thomas Connon.

Photo: WCMA ph 3582

adapted well to the rigors of soldiering, inspiring many and "matching the vigour of the younger men in marching."<sup>16</sup> In 1870, at the age of 66, Gairns volunteered to serve in the force being organized to head for Manitoba to quell the Kiel Rebellion.<sup>17</sup> Although he was passed over, the old sailor still had a reputation as one of the top marksmen in the area. The *Elora Observer* reported that James Gairns won the rifle competition at the Queen's Birthday celebrations in Elora in 1867.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, throughout the 1860s, Sandy Spalding's popularity as a fine musician steadily grew. He was always in demand for St. Andrew's Day festivities and was regularly booked to perform at local taverns.<sup>19</sup> Together with John Bain, a violin player and ex-boxer

who owned the Commercial Hotel, he played at an Art Exhibition sponsored by the Elora Mechanics Institute in the winter of 1866.<sup>20</sup> In Fergus, his Quadrille Band was in demand at a variety of functions including a Farewell Ball<sup>21</sup>, a Rifle Ball where more than 50 couples attended,<sup>22</sup> as well as numerous weddings and picnics. In February of 1865, along with a minstrel group known as the Buz-wig Brothers, Spalding's band entertained at the Agricultural Ball in Harriston.<sup>23</sup>

In the following decade Spalding's Quadrille Band was less active as its members were unable to compete with the professional touring acts that were appearing at local drill sheds and town halls. On occasion Sandy may have joined Andrew who, by the mid-1870s, was playing cornet and touring with two popular minstrel groups: the Buz-wig Bros, and the Mozambiques. Andrew was a trained musician but, following in his father's footsteps, he had also learned to play fiddle by ear. This skill saved him from serious trouble on at least one occasion. While playing for Buffalo Bill's Concert Band in the southern states, the band was confronted by an angry mob of southern Democrats demanding to hear the song "Dixie". The other members of the group were lost without their music sheets but Andrew calmly pulled out his fiddle and played the tune from memory.<sup>24</sup>

James Gairns, who, according to the *Fergus News-Record*, was "best known as a fiddler and a carpet weaver"<sup>25</sup> played his last note on November 10, 1872. In his obituary, he was described as a well-liked man and "not a habitual drinker." The account reads that on the morning of his death, Gairns walked to Elora to deliver a carpet to the home of a Mrs. Johnson. Before returning, he stopped in at a tavern and later left for home with a bottle of whiskey in hand. His routine was to follow the tracks of the Wellington, Grey and Bruce Railroad which turned south out of Elora paralleling the Guelph Road and ran just past

his home and weaving shop. For some unknown reason, on this occasion he headed in the opposite direction from the station toward Fergus. The *News-Record* reports that he was "cut to ribbons" by a train bound for Fergus on the tracks just a quarter mile from Elora. He was survived by his third wife and a six month old baby daughter. At 68 years of age, the mysterious sailor, pioneer bridge-builder, baker, soldier, weaver and fiddler became the first local casualty of the railway age.

Sandy Spalding was spared to outlive his usefulness. By the 1880s it seems that he was no longer in demand as a carpenter or a fiddler. On July 16, 1881, he was admitted to the County House of Industry and Refuge, listed as a "vagrant." Ironically, the magnificent County House which was erected in 1877, had been designed by his relative, John Taylor. By this time his wife had died and his four sons and three daughters were grown and living independently.<sup>26</sup> Duly noted on the pages of the County House registry as having "no means", he was re-admitted in February of 1882 and again in August 1883. He returned to live in the "poorhouse" for the last time on March 15, 1884. The reason given was simply "destitution." It seems, however, that his minstrel boy, Andrew, returned from his travels later that year, for by December, father and son were reunited as members of the Elora Philharmonic Society.<sup>27</sup> The *Elora Express* announced that Alexander Spalding was playing 1<sup>st</sup> violin with Andrew backing him up on 2<sup>nd</sup> violin.

For a time, at least, Sandy Spalding had regained his touch on the violin and managed to avoid a life of vagrancy and destitution. He was described as "a civil, respectable man whose only liability was a tendency to drink too much."<sup>28</sup> On October 5, 1889, at the age of 69, he was found dead on the Fergus lacrosse grounds. He was in the company of his dog and two empty bottles of whiskey.

In the decades that followed, at barn dances and house parties, some carried on the musical traditions established by the old backwoods fiddlers like Gairns and Spalding. Perhaps on occasion, their names were recalled and they were toasted, not as merely victims of their own short-comings but tragic heroes caught in the unforgiving web of time and rapid change.

## ENDNOTES:

1. Obituary, *Fergus News-Record*, November 22, 1872
2. John Connon, *The Early History of Flora and Vicinity* p. 128
3. *Ibid.* p. 129.
4. Obituary, *Fergus News-Record*, November 22, 1872.
5. Connon, p. 128.
6. *Elora Express*, August 29, 1928.
7. Connon, p. 105.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 199.
9. *Elora Backwoodsman*, August 17, 1859.
10. *Ibid.* August 31, 1859.
11. *Fergus Freeholder*, November 4, 1859
12. Connon, p. 130.
13. Andrew Spalding eventually became a professional cornet player and bandmaster. *Elora Express*, August 29, 1928.
14. Connon, p. 139 (In 1866 he was also presented with a six shooter revolver by Col. Charles Clarke, p. 143).
15. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
16. *Fergus News-Record*, November 22, 1872.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Elora Observer*, May 29, 1867.
19. *Ibid.*, December 15, 1864.
20. *Ibid.*, February 22, 1866.
21. *Ibid.*, November 21, 1862.
22. *Ibid.*, January 13, 1865.
23. *Ibid.*, February 10, 1865.
24. *Elora Express*, August 29, 1928.
25. *Fergus News-Record*, November 22, 1872.
26. *Ibid.*, Obituary, October 10, 1889.
27. *Flora Express*, December 4, 1884.
28. *Fergus News-Record*, Obituary, October 10, 1889.

# The Fergus Highland Games

## The Early Years 1946-1955

*by Wayne Hepburn*

The Fergus Highland Games was founded in 1946 as an ethnic festival, dependent upon an influx of ethnic Scots every year. The success of the Games was the result of a combination of factors. In 1946 the Second World War had just ended and the postwar euphoria, optimism and energy affected Fergus just as it did the rest of Canada. The infant Fergus Chamber of Commerce was eager to put Fergus on the map and the right man with the right idea came along at the right time. Alexander Robertson, an energetic champion of Scottish culture,<sup>1</sup> suggested the Chamber sponsor a highland games in Fergus, a town settled by Scots.<sup>2</sup> The Games fulfilled the Chamber's goal by becoming an annual event that attracted thousands of visitors every third Saturday in August.<sup>3</sup> Fergus received notoriety nationally and internationally as the Scottish town with the Highland Games.

Although this annual event still operates under the new title, Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games, this essay will examine the Highland Games of 1946-1955. This is the period during which the Games maintained much of the same organization, promotion, activities, format, volunteers and content. The essay will look at the ethnic base of the Fergus Highland Games and the reasons it began and was sustained.

### **An Ethnic Festival:**

Although the annual Fergus Highland Games was a public event, 'the Games' was targeted at and attended by ethnic Scots most of whom did not live in Fergus. Fergus had a large population of Scottish people, descendants of the early settlers of the 19th century.<sup>4</sup> It had been founded by Adam Fergusson who encouraged a settlement designed for Lowland Scots in 1833<sup>5</sup> although some Highlanders did arrive in the 1850s.<sup>6</sup> The descendants of the early arrivals were aware of their roots but had failed to maintain much of the cultural distinctiveness and traditions of Scotland. Elizabeth Templin, wife of Peter Templin, Highland Games Manager from 1952-1958, grew up in Fergus and helped her husband with the Games every summer. She recalled, "The Scottish traditions and noticeable Scottishness of the citizens were mellowing. It had become watered down through contact with the rest of the population of the

province. The majority had Scot backgrounds but there were few manifestations of it. You never saw a kilt except on festive occasions or when the Pipe Band would play."<sup>7</sup>

Fergus resident Pat Mestern edited *Looking Back: The Story of Fergus Through the Years* and authored *Fergus: A Scottish Town By Birthright*. She was also Coordinator of the Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games from 1984-1994. Born in 1940, she recalled,<sup>8</sup> "When I was growing up I can't remember one girl who knew anything about Scottish dancing. There was nobody to teach them. The people of the town had forgotten so much about Scotland that I doubt that if Alex hadn't gone around and gotten all these different out-of-town groups involved that there would have been a highland games."<sup>9</sup>

Even though Fergus was settled by Scots it had not previously been the site of a highland games. Highland games in Scotland became popularized when Queen Victoria bought the Balmoral estate and began attending the Braemar games beginning in 1843.<sup>10</sup> The Lowland Scots that settled Fergus beginning in 1833 did not hold such games.<sup>11</sup> There is some evidence that the citizens of early Fergus did participate in some typical Scottish games such as throwing the stone but there is no evidence that any organized public competitions were held.<sup>12</sup> A number of published attempts by the Chamber of Commerce claim that "These modern Highland Games were revived in 1946 by the Fergus Chamber of Commerce."<sup>13</sup> However, the tradition of the Highland Games in Fergus is an invented one.<sup>14</sup>

In 1946, most citizens were ignorant of the concept of a highland games. Editor and owner of the *Fergus News-Record*, Hugh Templin upon the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Highland Games in 1955, reflected upon the meeting in 1946 when the Chamber approved Robertson's idea, "The rest of us knew nothing about highland games."<sup>15</sup> When the idea of a highland games for Fergus was announced there was much skepticism.<sup>16</sup> William Templin, then photographer for the *Fergus News-Record* and son of the editor and owner recalled, "People said the chamber was crazy. They said nobody here knows anything about a highland games."<sup>17</sup>

They were right, apart from Alex Robertson who planned to import the knowledge of the various components of a highland games from out of town along with the core audience. Alex Robertson's son, Robert, worked in Toronto in the summer of 1946. He recalled, "My father would stay with me while he went around to see the various Scottish societies and pipe bands. He would present the program and encourage them to attend and alert their membership."<sup>18</sup>

The people who made the Highland Games a success were those whose Scottish ethnic identity was still strong: members of Scottish Societies, the practitioners of the traditional Scottish arts of bagpiping, and Scottish dancing. Many of these people were recent immigrants.<sup>19</sup> These were the people Robertson targeted: the ethnic Scots. Many of them had held on to their culture. They were scattered in communities around southern Ontario and had been practising piping and Highland dancing but had few forums to display their art

and culture. The Fergus Highland Games provided an opportunity for them to showcase it.<sup>20</sup>

Ethnicity is defined by Max Weber as "human groups (other than Kinship groups) which cherish a belief in their common origins of such a kind that it provides a basis for the creation of a community."<sup>21</sup> The subjective approach to ethnicity depends upon self-ascription [that is, by assigning oneself to the group voluntarily].<sup>22</sup> The Fergus Highland Games brought together recent Scottish immigrants who had a keen sense of their Scottish ethnicity and traditions with Canadians of Scottish ancestry, like Fergusite Robert Kerr, whose families over two, three and four generations had stopped practising many of the ethnic folk ways.<sup>23</sup> Robert Kerr, General Manager of the Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games from 1985-1991, was nineteen when the first Fergus Highland Games was held. He recalled, "My great grandfather came here in 1850 and all my friends at school had Scottish roots like mine. We took our Scottish ethnicity for granted. When I was a kid we celebrated Hogmanay but gradually it started to die out. Like bringing a lump of coal when you visited."<sup>24</sup>

One of the avowed purposes of the Highland Games as articulated in the greeting from the Chamber of Commerce in the 1947 program was, "to stir the blood of all those who boast of their Scottish birth or ancestry."<sup>25</sup> The Festival did provide an ethnic gathering for those who considered themselves Scottish and a curiosity to many of the 'Fergus Scots' who were discovering what a Scottish highland games involved. The *Fergus News-Record* reported after the 1947 Games that, "thousands did come attracted by the unusual Scottish type of program."<sup>26</sup>

Fergus was a hospitable site and sponsor for a highland games. However, the founder, Alex Robertson, and committee members H.A. "Huck" Trimble and Tim Bradley had to depend upon the Scottish network of pipe bands, dance groups and their respective regulating societies to organize the competitions that were the core of such an event.<sup>27</sup> Hugh Templin commented on the 1946 Highland Games in a 1948 column, "The bandsmen did not know much about Fergus. Fergus did not know much about Caledonian sports although the town did have a pipe band of which it was proud and a fine, kept park."<sup>28</sup> The Pipers and Pipe Band Society of Ontario and the Highland Dancers Society of Ontario organized their respective competitions.<sup>29</sup> The strong Scottish element in the Toronto Police Athletic Association<sup>30</sup> organized the 'heavy events' feature of a highland games<sup>31</sup> such as tossing the caber, throwing the hammer, shot-put and throwing the 56 lb. weight for height, and the tug-of-war.<sup>32</sup> The Fergus Highland Games was so dependent on these groups for the organization of the core competitions that a dispute over transportation costs for the Toronto Police Athletics Association caused the 'heavy events' to be omitted from the 1953 Games.<sup>33</sup>

This network not only provided the competitors but went a long way towards providing the audience as well.<sup>34</sup> For example, the Toronto Police Association had developed rivalries with other forces such as the Detroit Police

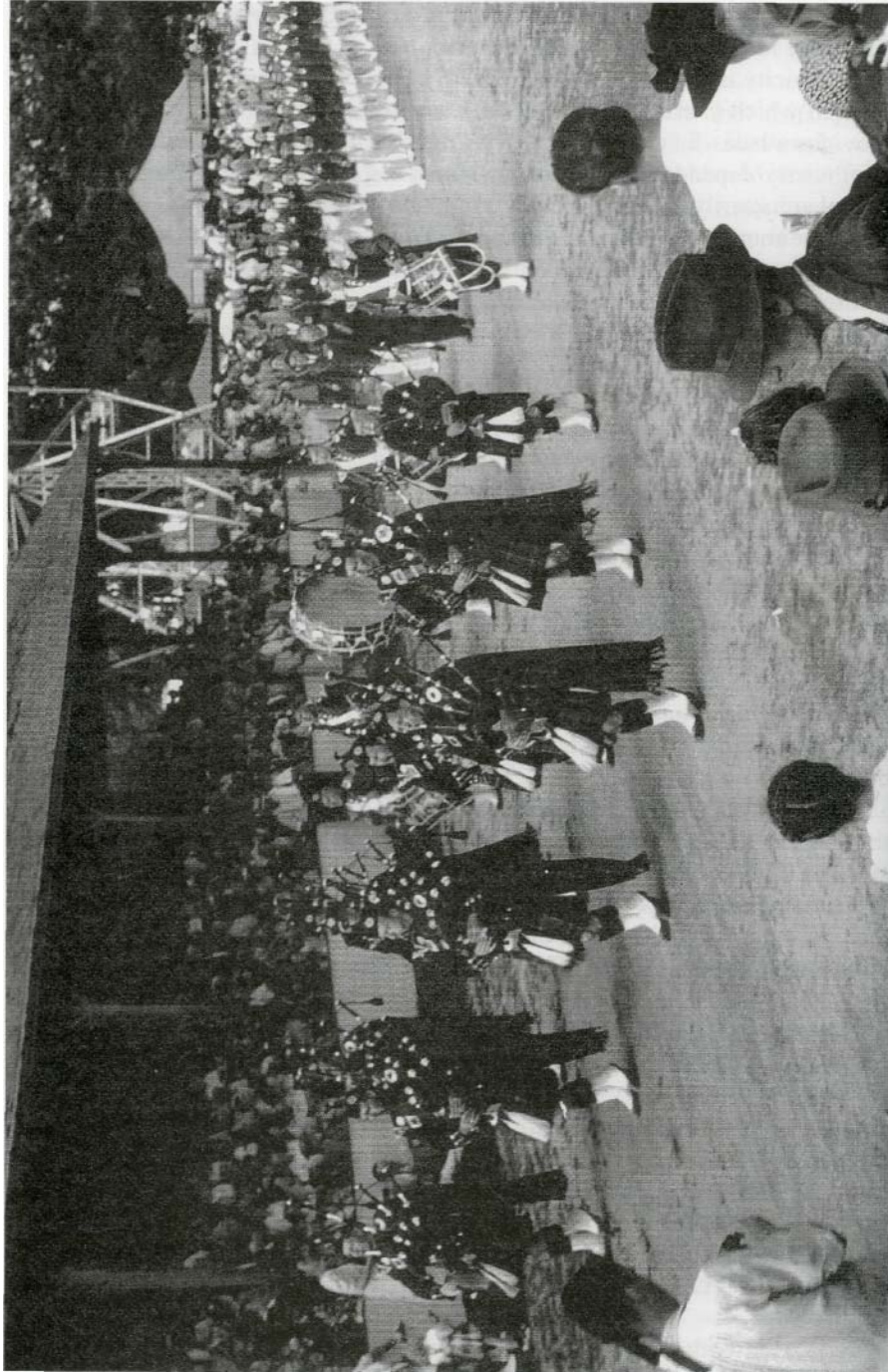


Figure 1: "Parade of Opening of Games", Fergus Highland Games, 1946 .

Photo: Collection of Robert Robertson.

Association who came to compete in the heavy events like the ever popular tug-of-war.<sup>35</sup> These competitors brought their families and friends and this 'built-in' audience spread the news, by word of mouth, to other interested people.<sup>36</sup> Pipe bands like the 48th Highlanders of Toronto, the Toronto Scottish, the Fergus Pipe Band, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Hamilton, and their supporters would come out in force.<sup>37</sup>

The Fergus Committee led by Alex Robertson was ably assisted by the Chamber members, such as Hugh Templin who brokered the promotional coup of inviting radio personalities Jim Hunter and Gordon Sinclair to broadcast from the site.<sup>38</sup> The advance hype from radio station CFRB proved invaluable as a special train from Toronto stopped in Parkdale, West Toronto and Georgetown on games days.<sup>39</sup> The out-of-town crowd was no small component as a 1948 display advertisement in the *Fergus News-Record* announced: "Train arrives in downtown Fergus before the Highland Games begin."<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Templin recalled, "A parade would bring everyone up to Victoria Park and the Highland Games would begin."<sup>41</sup> (Figure 1)

The early managers (Alex Robertson 1946-1950; Tim Bradley, 1951; and Peter Templin, 1952-1958),<sup>42</sup> and their committees stayed steadfast in their approach. They targeted the ethnic Scottish crowd, and this strategy gradually attracted tourists of non-Scottish descent. William Templin reflected on this, "At first there were very few people that didn't have a Scottish background or interest that would come to a Highland Games. They didn't know what it was. Once they found out and how enjoyable it was they began coming but that was a number of years down the road."<sup>43</sup> An editorial on the Fergus games in the *Guelph Mercury* in August 19, 1955 predicted, "It will be a great day for the Scots."<sup>44</sup>

As with most annual fairs, variations usually occur every year.<sup>45</sup> The Fergus Highland games remained remarkably similar for the first ten years but some features not central to the theme came and went as the organizers searched for attractions that might draw a bigger crowd. The first two years featured an evening competition for the crown of Miss Wellington County.<sup>46</sup> It was popular but the women of Fergus became reluctant to subject themselves to the public main street parade of the 1946 event.<sup>47</sup> In 1947 only one woman registered.<sup>48</sup> A midway was small and concentrated on children's attractions.<sup>49</sup> (Figure 2) Vendors of Scottish wares such as heather, tartans and refreshments were a mainstay.<sup>50</sup> The athletics organizers from Toronto produced a track and field meet. Pole vaulting, (Figure 3) the discus and running events were mingled with the 'heavy events'.<sup>51</sup> Evening dances featuring contemporary music<sup>52</sup> were held each year usually in the Fergus Arena<sup>53</sup> but sometimes St. Andrew's Street would be closed for a street dance.<sup>54</sup> Even a fiddlers' contest, horseshoe-pitching and a bicycle race were tried in 1946.<sup>55</sup> In 1954 a "Monster Bingo - All Day" and a soap box derby were tried.<sup>56</sup> However, for the most part the Fergus Highland Games stayed true to its successful formula of a traditional games (piping, Highland dancing and heavy events)<sup>57</sup> and grew in attendance steadily. The attendance in 1946 was 5,600<sup>58</sup> and surpassed the 10,000 mark by 1953.<sup>59</sup>



Figure 2: "Midway and Concessions", Fergus Highland Games, 1946 .

Photo: Collection of Robert Robertson.

### **Why a Fergus Highland Games?**

#### **Right Place, Right Person, Right Time:**

Thus was established a successful ethnic Scottish festival, the Fergus Highland Games. The factors that spawned this event and caused it to thrive are multiple. It was really a matter of the right person, in the right place, at the right time. It is probable that no such festival would have arisen in Fergus if it were not for its Scottish origins, appearance and population base of those of Scottish ancestry. Fergus was the right place for a Scottish event. The rich strand of Scottish heritage in Fergus inspired the right person, the determined advocate for Scottish culture: Alexander Robertson. He conceived the Fergus Highland Games, spread his vision with enthusiasm to others and made it a reality. Robertson's enthusiasm was an exact fit for the Fergus Chamber of Commerce. In 1946 the Chamber had a keen desire to break out of the doldrums of the previous six years of wartime deprivation and make a mark for Fergus in the exciting, euphoric and optimistic environment of postwar Canada. 1946 was the right time to establish the Fergus Highland Games.

#### **Fergus - The Right Place:**

If you spend some time in Fergus you will see signs from yesterday that tell of Scottish roots. "There are those that say: 'Oh Fergus: its just a Canadian town that was founded by Scots.' But they're not Scottish. The Scots recognize the 19th century architecture that gives the town an inherent Scottish feel." These are the words of William Templin who grew up in such a house on Union Street. He added, "That typical Scottish stone masonry with blocks of limestone and mortar is typified by thick walls with window sills wide enough to sit on." <sup>60</sup> Another sign of Scottish origin is St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, built in 1835, <sup>61</sup> on the highest hill in town. The Auld Kirk Yard at St Andrew's is full of tombstones engraved with Scottish names such as MacKay, Robertson and Duncan from places like Perthshire, Aberdeenshire, and Ayrshire. <sup>62</sup> The Fergus Curling Club was founded in 1834, according to the plaque from the Ontario Heritage Foundation that adorns its outer wall.

Although the observance of Scottish traditions may have been fading during the 1930s and 1940s, yet there was still a Scottish presence. William Templin recalled:

My great grandfather was Hugh Black the first tavern owner and my mother's family came from Scotland way back. There were a lot of people with Scottish roots. The ethnic mix started changing rapidly after the war but when I was growing up there were two Jewish families a couple of Chinese and a few Italians, and the rest were WASP and Scottish. The Catholic Church only had half a dozen families.

Templin added:

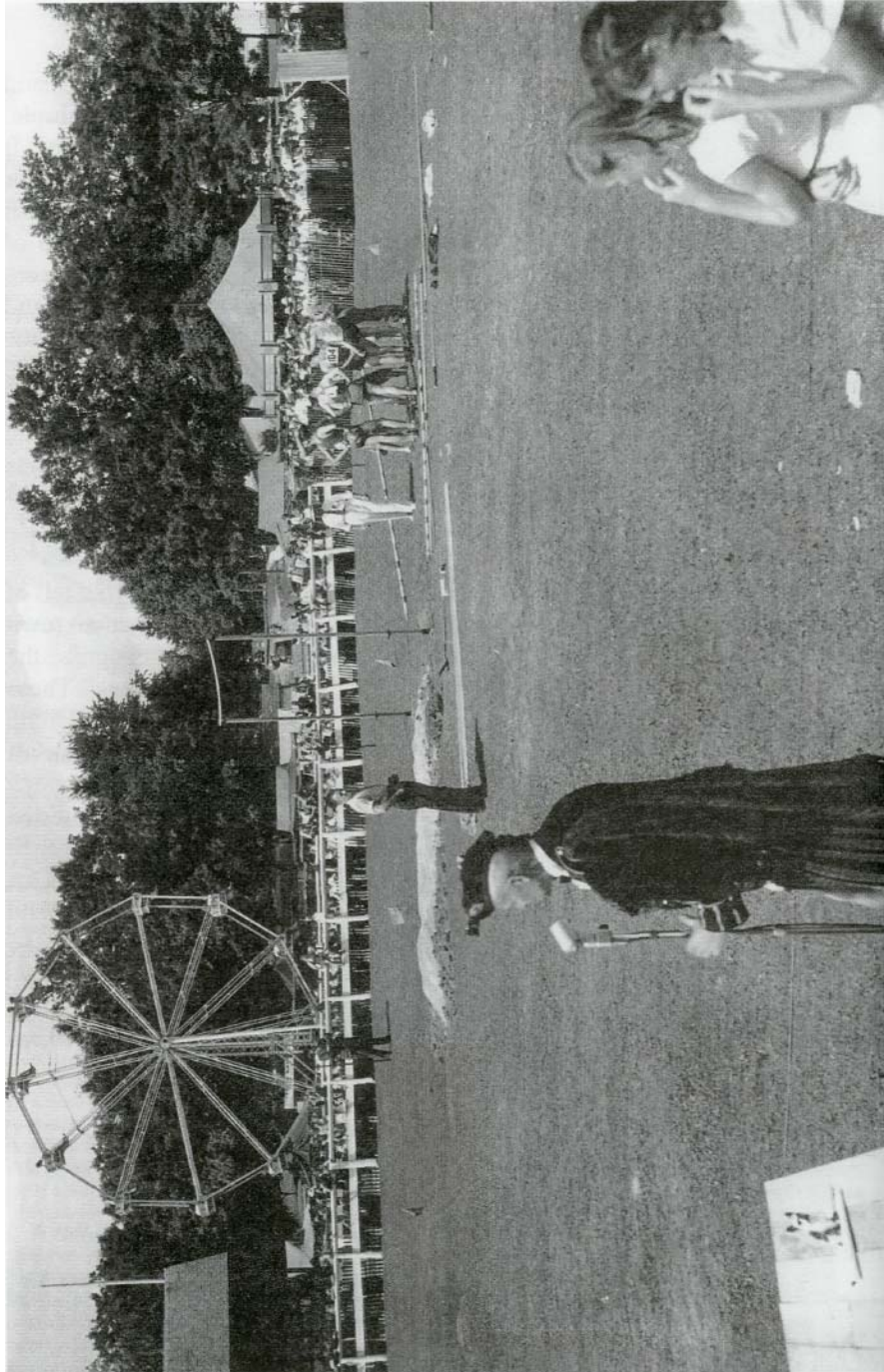


Figure 3: "Pole Vault - Alex Robertson", Fergus Highland Games, 1946.

Photo: Collection of Robert Robertson.

My mother's grandmother spoke Gaelic and she still had some Scottish dialect words that she used . . . There was a Scottish presence around in small ways for example the names of stores like the Scotch Bakery and the Highland Market.<sup>63</sup>

The Fergus Pipe Band, formed in 1927,<sup>64</sup> had roused the memory of peoples' Scottish roots. In his 1954 letter of acceptance of the position of Honorary Vice- President of the Fergus Pipe Band, P.M. Macdonald encouraged the band to play more in public. He wrote, "You know how quickly the sound of our pipe band draws a crowd on the streets, how the people young and old collect as fast as they can gather. They love to hear the band and see the splendid sight of the drummer and pipers swinging up the street. It makes their blood tingle."<sup>65</sup> Elizabeth Templin concurred, "My father was a Morrison and he loved the pipes. When he died they had a military funeral with the Fergus Pipe Band doing a slow march to the cemetery playing Road to the Isles. I always get shivers up my back when I hear a pipe band."<sup>66</sup>

#### **Alex Robertson - The Right Person:**

The right man in this equation, Alex Robertson, emigrated from Aberdeen Scotland to Canada in 1921. He came to Fergus in 1945 as Land Settlement Officer for the Department of Veterans Affairs.<sup>67</sup> However, he was no stranger to Fergus. Peter Templin wrote in 1993, "His wife, Margaret, was a daughter of Bill Stewart, a long time resident of Fergus."<sup>68</sup> According to Pat Mestern, Fergus reminded him of his native Scotland. When she was Highland Games coordinator, he would call her regularly to offer his insights and advice.<sup>69</sup> She recalled, "He said Fergus looked like a street in Aberdeen. He realized the architecture was here but the dialect and Scottish culture was disappearing."<sup>70</sup> According to Mestern, Robertson's suggestion of a highland games was partly an attempt to preserve and even revive the Scottish nature of Fergus.<sup>71</sup> She said, "Alex believed the Scottish heritage of the community was being lost as other nationalities came to populate the area."<sup>72</sup> Her opinion is based on her conversations with Mr. Robertson but there are no other references to this intention. The goal of preserving the Scottish traditions of Fergus is not referred to in any source until much later.<sup>73</sup>

Hugh Templin recalled the day the Fergus Highland games was born, "They had called in Alex Robertson to consult on some unemployment or veterans' problem. He suggested that Fergus might try a highland games day. There wasn't a native-born Scot in the room except Alex, but many whose ancestors came from Scotland and they liked the idea."<sup>74</sup> Alex had visited highland games in Scotland 25 years earlier and one more recently in Canada.<sup>75</sup> His enthusiasm was enough to convince the Chamber that they could pull it off. He was appointed Chairman of the Fergus Highland Games Committee.<sup>76</sup> Mestern asserted, "Alex really did feel strongly about his culture. Those in the Scot community were impressed with that."<sup>77</sup>

### **Postwar - The Right Time:**

Alex Robertson, the enthusiastic Scot with a somewhat outsider's view of Fergus had come to town but if it hadn't been the right time (1946), the Fergus Highland Games might not have come to be. World War II was just over and Canadians like those in Fergus were ready to break out of a six-year pattern of doing without.<sup>78</sup> Employment was plentiful during the war years and there were large amounts of savings in the hands of many Canadians.<sup>79</sup> Robert Robertson, who served in the Canadian Air Force during World War II, was twenty-four in 1946. He recalled, "When the war ended people were happy they were getting ahead. During the war munitions plants paid good wages. People were getting a few dollars in their pockets. After the war it kept building up. People were starved for something to do for entertainment."<sup>80</sup> William Templin added, "Everybody was so glad to have it over and to have a chance to buy car tires again and get gasoline without rationing."<sup>81</sup>

People wanted to travel. Returning veterans added to the need to be on the move. Mestern reflected on the attitude she witnessed as a child, "They had been all over Italy and Germany and France and they weren't willing to sit at home like they did in the 1920s and 1930s and go twenty miles away to visit somebody. People weren't homebodies anymore."<sup>82</sup>

This desire to get out and be active was enhanced by the fact that the money people had saved during the war could not be spent on the domestic goods people so desired. Items from toasters to washing machines to cars were in short supply in Canada until 1948 and 1949.<sup>83</sup> According to Joy Parr in her book *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic of the Postwar Years*, "In 1947 Canadians were spending less of their disposable income on consumer durables than they had in 1941."<sup>84</sup> There was a palpable demand, as "customers were not spending but negotiating with retailers for places on waiting lists."<sup>85</sup> The Canadian government had decided the best path for Canada was to stress the manufacture of machinery for industry with the aim of a strong export sector and to encourage investment.<sup>86</sup> Industry was encouraged by the Canadian government to produce machinery as opposed to domestic goods by "generous credits for investment and export and a minimum of regulation."<sup>87</sup> As a result Canadians had to wait years for some of the appliances and goods they could now afford but could not buy.

It is no coincidence that people with extra cash and nowhere to spend it would satisfy their need to 'get out', travel and entertain themselves by attending public events. In 1946 there is plenty of evidence of large attendance at events in the Fergus area. Among the turnouts that August were a crowd of 2,500 at a baseball game in Waterloo on August 24,<sup>88</sup> 800 horse racing fans at the rain-dampened Fergus Horse Races on August 28,<sup>89</sup> 1,000 Gait baseball fans at a Gait Terriers Game<sup>90</sup> and a crowd of 1,000 at an Intermediate Lacrosse League game in Fergus<sup>91</sup> ( population 2,700).<sup>92</sup> The Fergus Highland Games' attendance of 5,600 on August 17<sup>93</sup> was a large crowd and another example of how people of that time were keen to get out and see spectacles.

There was also a sense of relief that the war was over and a sense of

gratitude towards those who had served. Robert Kerr recalled that one of the purposes of the 1946 Highland Games was to "hail the end of the war."<sup>94</sup> Peter Templin, in his 1993 article on the inaugural Fergus Highland Games, tells of, "The night before the Games the town held a banquet for 250 service veterans and their guests along with a public dance in the arena."<sup>95</sup>

William Templin remembered the atmosphere of the postwar years, "There was a whole feeling of optimism at that time about everything. I can remember it well. This feeling of optimism was a major factor in the success of the Highland Games."<sup>96</sup>

### **Town Boosterism:**

In 1946, the business leaders in Fergus were well aware of the postwar climate and worried they might miss opportunities for progress. The Fergus Service Club invited speakers from the Canadian and Ontario Chambers of Commerce. The members became enthused about the possibilities that a Fergus Chamber of Commerce might offer for boosting the town and attracting tourism and industry.<sup>97</sup> At a public meeting on April 9, 1946 the Fergus Service Club presented a set of bylaws and a slate of officers and the Fergus Chamber of Commerce was born.<sup>98</sup>

The newly-formed Fergus Chamber of Commerce was eager to promote Fergus. Their *raison d'être* was articulated in the *Fergus News-Record*, "There is urgent need for such an organization at the present time, when there is a tendency for industries to seek locations in smaller cities or towns. Some of our neighbouring municipalities have already been able to persuade small or large industries to locate there."<sup>99</sup> It was into this atmosphere that Alex Robertson came with his idea of a highland games. Robertson may have wanted to revitalize the Scottish culture of Fergus and provide an event for the display of Scottish culture in Southern Ontario. However, he was keenly aware of the main reason the Chamber sponsored a Fergus Highland Games. The Fergus Chamber of Commerce wanted to boost Fergus, attract attention to the village and attract new industry.<sup>100</sup> In a 1964 interview in the *Guelph Mercury*, Robertson said, "The original purpose of the Games was to give the town distinction."<sup>101</sup> In 1988, he added, "The business of the day in 1946 was searching for a way to attract people to Fergus."<sup>102</sup> The Chamber jumped at Robertson's idea of a highland games as a vehicle for boosting Fergus.<sup>103</sup> A committee was formed consisting of Robertson, H.A. "Huck" Trimble, and Tim Bradley, R.D. Kerr, and Rennie Caldwell. Athletics specialists from the University of Toronto and Toronto Police, Hec Phillips and Art Key were added to the committee later.<sup>104</sup> The committee was confident but there was no time for second thoughts. The event was really a "bit of a gamble" as it was pulled together in little more than two months.<sup>105</sup> However, it succeeded through lots of hard work and determination.<sup>106</sup>

The goal of boosting Fergus was fulfilled immediately and continued over the years through the favourable coverage provided by the press, radio and television. Right from the beginning the Highland Games Committee struck up

arrangements with Toronto radio stations. In 1946, radio station CFRB agreed to broadcast Jim Hunter's 6:30 pm news broadcast from Victoria Park on Games Day.<sup>107</sup> Hunter plugged the event repeatedly in the weeks leading up to the August 17th date.<sup>108</sup> This formula was followed often as various radio shows were broadcast from Fergus on, or the Sunday after, Games Day. Hunter returned in 1947 and CFRB also broadcast "The Northern Ramblers" old time program from the town hall.<sup>109</sup> In 1951 CBC Radio aired their Sunday Morning show "Neighbourly News" from Fergus the day following the Highland Games.<sup>110</sup> Guelph radio station CJOY aired a live broadcast from the Games in 1953.<sup>111</sup> In later years CFRB's Gordon Sinclair became Fergus Highland Games Chieftain and attended yearly.<sup>112</sup>

In 1953, Hugh Templin enthused, "The Fergus Chamber of Commerce hit the jackpot when it started the Games...Three Toronto papers and those from London, Kitchener and Guelph all featured the kilted lassies and the pipers and drummers. There is literally thousands of dollars worth of publicity for Fergus on the front pages of those papers."<sup>113</sup> That was the case every year during August as newspapers in the region would carry advance articles about the Games and Fergus, and would follow up with photos of the colourful costumed dress and activities along with the appropriate captions and stories. On August 21, 1950, The *Toronto Star* featured a collage of five photos of the Fergus Highland Games along side photos of the Royal Family and memorial ceremonies at Dieppe. The caption read, "The Fergus area was settled by people from Scotland and games create great interest."<sup>114</sup> In 1949, The *Guelph Mercury* ran a preview article on August 19. The title read, "Expect Highland Games To Draw Audience Exceeding 10,000 Dancing Entries Total 300."<sup>115</sup> The story went on to say that competitors were coming from as far away as Boston, Winnipeg and Michigan. In 1954, the *Fergus News-Record* reported that Highland Games Manager Peter Templin and Alex Robertson would travel to Kitchener for an interview on the Games for CKCO Television.<sup>116</sup>

The committee was not content with coverage from only the main centres to the south of Fergus and travelled to what they considered a key node of Scottish descendants to the north.<sup>117</sup> The *Fergus News-Record* reported in 1951, "On Friday Tim Bradley, manager, Percy Gibson and Hugh Templin, editor, are starting a good will tour of the country to the north of Fergus, spreading the news."<sup>118</sup> William Templin recently reflected, "The Highland Games certainly did its job that way by promoting the town of Fergus. The Highland Games helped put the town on the map."<sup>119</sup> Elizabeth Templin agreed, "The Highland Games and Fergus are synonymous. When people think of Fergus they think of the Highland Games."<sup>120</sup>

The attention that Fergus received was valuable as a means of creating awareness of the town and giving it an image. However, there were some direct monetary benefits. There was a boost to local business on the days preceding and certainly on Games Day as stores opened in the morning then closed during the Games and then opened again during the evening "for the convenience of shoppers and visitors."<sup>121</sup> Stores would run specials related to the Games. For

example, Max Elkin's clothing store ran a 1948 advertisement: "Hoot mon! Meet your friends at the Fergus Highland Games and call in at Max Elkin's" <sup>122</sup> The Fergus Scotch Bakery advertised, "Scotch Oatcakes for Highland Games Weekend" in 1954. <sup>123</sup>

It wasn't only Fergus and its businesses that got a boost. Keith Walden in his book, *Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture*, says that fairs often boost the profile of organizations. <sup>124</sup> That was certainly the case with the Fergus Chamber of Commerce. Within their first year of existence, the Fergus Highland Games had established the reputation of the Chamber of Commerce as an effective, competent and positive force in the community.

### **Civic Pride:**

The town and the Chamber of Commerce got a boost and so did civic pride. Civic pride then helped sustain the annual Fergus Highland Games. The people of Fergus, through their Chamber of Commerce, hosted an annual success that gave Fergus a profile not only in the region and in Canada but also in the United States. The *Fergus News-Record* and other newspapers continually referred to the visitors from the United States. <sup>125</sup> The fact that people from afar would come to Fergus was a badge of success and a matter of civic pride. The comments such as, "People came from far away such as New England and as far west as Oklahoma" <sup>126</sup> and, "Hotel space is all booked up in Fergus and Guelph by visitors from places like Montreal, Boston and Detroit" <sup>127</sup> continually appeared in print.

The town had a population of about 3,000 people at that time. Visiting crowds of 6,000 and 10,000 people more that doubled and tripled the size of the community. The Games was a significant feat for Fergus. <sup>128</sup> The Fergus Highland Games may have been a Chamber of Commerce sponsored-and-administered event but the town as a whole was integral to the operation and resolve that was required to accomplish such a large event. The *Fergus News-Record* effused in 1948, "There is a fine spirit of cooperation in Fergus. Merchants, council, manufacturers and various organizations as well as a host of interested individuals combine to make the Fergus Games famous." <sup>129</sup>

The Games depended upon the support of local businesses and volunteers alike. The contribution of business can be witnessed in the one hundred and two ads of the impressive seventy-page 1946 program. <sup>130</sup> Scores of volunteers were essential as they provided the necessary labour. Volunteers served at the refreshment booths for the various local organizations and charities. They also served as security, helped with set up and assisted with the always tedious tear down and clean up. Robertson and the managers who followed all appreciated the town effort that was involved in the Highland Games. Robert Robertson recalled, "My father had a lot of volunteers at all the Highland Games and he thought a lot of them." <sup>131</sup> In the aftermath of the 1951 Highland Games the *Fergus News-Record* described the members of the Games Committee and the many volunteers as "going around with satisfied smiles and the sense of having

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Fergus News-Record, 19 August 1948

done something well worth while." <sup>132</sup> The Fergus Highland Games was a town effort and a matter of civic pride.

The civic pride of volunteers also helped to sustain and keep the Games functioning. The volunteers necessary to operate the event had bought into the value of the Games. You didn't need to be of Scottish ancestry to be proud of the Games as well as Fergus, and help out. Bill Thorns, a native Scot and former General Manager (1969-1970) said, "Even though this has always been a Scottish festival over the years there have been a number of people involved that have no Scottish roots but they demonstrate their pride in their community by helping to preserve our Scottish heritage through the festival." <sup>133</sup> Pat Mestern recalled that many of the volunteers and officials were not of Scottish descent. "Bill Geiger was Manager of the Games for many years and he was as German as you could get. The Templins were part German, I am part Italian and the present President of the Festival corporation is French-Canadian." <sup>134</sup> The citizens of Fergus were proud of what they could accomplish. <sup>135</sup> The attitude in Fergus was: "The Fergus Highland Games is a tourist attraction of the first grade." <sup>136</sup>

The Highland Games was a reflection of the changing face of the Fergus community. <sup>137</sup> As it emerged from World War II social inactivity, the Highland Games gave Fergus and its citizens a sense of accomplishment and confidence about its place in Ontario and North America and the world of the ethnic Scots. As Pat Mestern put it, "Before the war Fergus didn't have much to attract tourists." <sup>138</sup>

#### **The Ethnic Scots of Fergus - A Changing Attitude:**

Another factor that helped sustain the Fergus Highland Games was an increasing ethnic awareness among Fergusites of Scottish ancestry. Pat Mestern's contention that Robertson wanted to preserve the Scottish heritage of Fergus may be true, but the intended goals of the Chamber of Commerce did not include this in the early years - an example of how Walden describes a fair, "contributes intentionally and unintentionally to the shaping of understandings." <sup>139</sup> This result may well have been intentional on the part of Alex Robertson and unintentional on the part of the Fergus Chamber of Commerce.

To the Fergus Chamber of Commerce the goal of the Highland Games was boosting Fergus. The idea of Fergus' Scottish roots seemed but a convenient back drop that justified hosting such an event. The *Fergus News-Record* reported, "The early history of Fergus tied in nicely. So the Chamber took the jump." <sup>140</sup> The Chamber was so eager to get something going during the postwar years that another idea might have suited them just as well. As Hugh Templin recalled, "They were willing to try anything once, if it had a fair chance of success." <sup>141</sup> William Templin said, "The Highland Games was really a promotional idea of the Chamber of Commerce. As far as I know there was no other reason for holding it." <sup>142</sup> However, as time went on the repeated annual publicity about the town's origins, the cultural activity of the Highland Games

themselves, and the investment of time and effort by many Fergusites began to change attitudes in Fergus and the goals of the Games. Eventually a more active role in preserving Scottish traditions in Fergus became apparent. By the 1980s, things had changed. In the 1987 program, one of the goals of the Fergus Highland Games was stated as: "to preserve the Scottish heritage of the (Fergus) community."<sup>143</sup>

The formalized idea that the purpose of preserving the Scottish heritage or traditions of Fergus may have come later but, in 1946 there is no mention of it. In the 1952 Chamber of Commerce promotional booklet *Fergus Ontario*, the section on the Highland Games states: "The Games advertise Fergus, recall its early traditions ..." However, this reference is to the myth of the "revival of the traditional Games in Fergus."<sup>144</sup> There is no mention of an attempt to preserve a Scottish heritage or traditions of Fergus. Hugh Templin was Vice-President of the 1946 Fergus Chamber of Commerce and President in 1947.<sup>145</sup> In a 1948 *Fergus News-Record* column he listed the goals of the Fergus Highland Games, "It is an invitation to Scottish people everywhere to gather together to enjoy their colourful national pastime and thrill to the music of the pipe band and the rhythm and beauty of the dancers. It is an invitation to the people of Fergus to come back and meet old friends. It is a tourist attraction of the first grade."<sup>146</sup> There is no mention of preserving the Scottish heritage or traditions of Fergus.

However, during the first decade of the Fergus Highland Games, signs of an awakening sense of Fergus' Scottish ethnicity began to appear in the pages of the *Fergus News-Record*. In 1949, the Ladies Auxiliary of the Canadian Legion sold heather to be worn in the buttonhole or coat-lapel at the Highland Games. The ladies had the heather imported from Scotland as the *Guelph Mercury* reported, "The flower was taken off the Lonach Hills where Fergus Scots have strolled."<sup>147</sup> In 1952, a hint of acknowledgment of an effect on Scottish ethnic awareness is a joking reference by Hugh Templin after the 1952 games: "Most people in Fergus will be putting away their Scotch accents and vocabulary for another year."<sup>148</sup> A year later Templin expressed this awareness more clearly, "Our Scottish ancestors came to Canada generations ago but we still feel that tingling sensation up the spine when 300 pipers and drummers play "Road to the Isles", a piece of music that wasn't written when those ancestors made the slow trip to Fergus in pioneer days."<sup>149</sup> By 1953, the *Fergus News-Record* called for changes in the Games to reflect Fergus' Scottish roots, "more of a tie in with the Fergus history."<sup>150</sup>

The Fergus Highland Games, as an ethnic festival, was an immediate and continuing success. As time went on it brought about an ethnic awareness in those Fergusites of Scottish descent. Elizabeth Templin said, "Without the Highland Games I wouldn't be as aware as I am of my Scottish roots. My daughter doesn't follow a lot of the Scottish traditions but she knows about them and now she wants her son to learn to play the bagpipes. The Highland games have kept the awareness of the Scottish ethnic traditions alive in Fergus."<sup>151</sup> Today in Fergus many people seem to have some ethnic tie or at least adopt a Scottish ethnic ascription. Former Games General Manager, Bruce

Youngblood, revealed, "Kilts are worn everywhere in Fergus on formal occasions like the Rotary Club functions or the Chamber of Commerce Dinner." <sup>152</sup> Bill Beattie another former Manager added, "If you don't wear a kilt people will make fun of you." <sup>153</sup>

The idea of being ethnic Scots was not really a priority for Fergusites when the Games first began. However, the idea of a big event in town that attracted people from far and wide was exciting and exotic. After the deprivations of the World War II period, a celebration, a party and colourful pageantry was a welcome experience. The *Fergus News-Record* reported on the 1947 Games, "When the special train left for Toronto at 11 o'clock and long after that, the downtown streets had a sort of old boys reunion air, with impromptu parades, clowns, piping and a general good time, as people seemed unwilling to go home."<sup>154</sup> Later that night sound asleep in his bed twenty-one year old William Templin was awoken. His memory is vivid:

At two o'clock in the morning two pipers came down the middle of the road playing their bagpipes. This was two o'clock Sunday morning and they were drunk as skunks. They were enjoying themselves; and that was kind of the feeling everyone was having at the time. Nobody bothered them, including the police. That was kind of fun. I remember distinctly hearing those two pipers coming down the road in the middle of the night. Normally you would be ticked off at being woken up but I found it (pause) kind of romantic. <sup>155</sup>

The Fergus Highland Games was initiated by the Fergus Chamber of Commerce in August of 1946 as an ethnic event. Its aim was to bring the ethnic Scots, mostly from out of town, to Fergus to gather and celebrate their culture. Its purpose was to draw attention to Fergus with the end of attracting business to the town. In the midst of the post Second World War enthusiasm the Chamber of Commerce was eager for a means of boosting the town. They readily grasped Alexander Robertson's idea of a highland games to attract attention to Fergus. The idea seemed a natural due to Fergus' image as a Scottish town, even though the population was mostly ignorant of what a highland games was. Fergus had been settled by Scots in 1833 and had maintained a reputation as a Scottish town. However, in 1946 the many families of Scottish descent were three and four generations away from Scotland and were in the process of losing their ancestral traditions and folk ways. The Fergus Chamber of Commerce succeeded in boosting their town as it had intended but their action also spawned what was for them an unintended result: the awakening of a Scottish ethnic awareness in the citizens of Fergus.

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- 6 A.D. Fordyce, "Old Times in Fergus", Circa 1837-1854. *Looking Back: The Story of Fergus Through The Years* Volume 1, ed. Pat Mestern (Fergus, 1983) p.94; Pat Mestern, *Looking Back: The Story of Fergus Through The Years* Volume 1, (Fergus, 1983) p.97-98.
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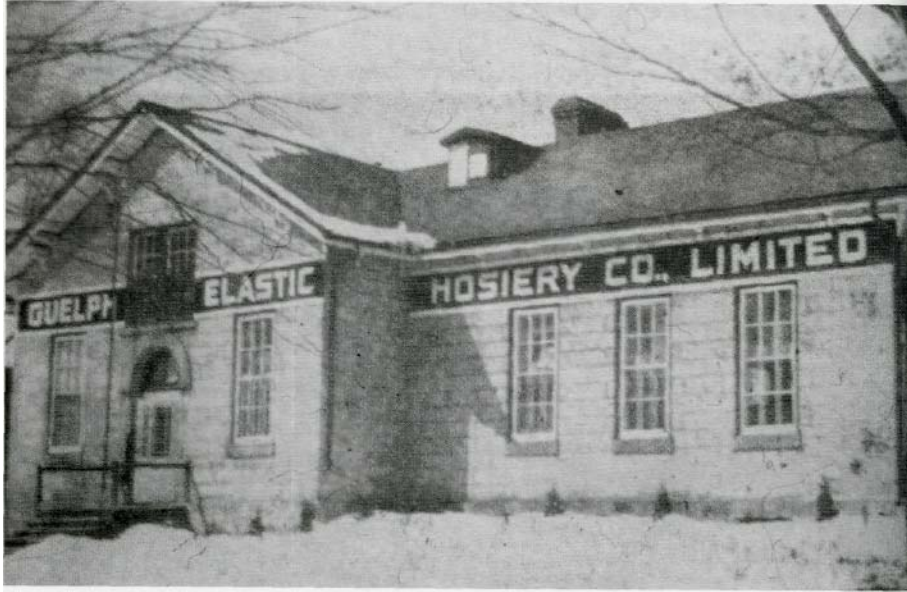
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The Guelph Elastic Hosiery Co. Ltd., formerly the Old Ward School, Ca. 1900. Photo: WCMA Couling Collection 8425

# The Guelph Cup: 300 Million Worldwide

*by Gregory Oakes*

The Stanley Cup is the most famous trophy in Canadian sports history, but the cup patented by Jack Cartledge of Guelph has made an even greater impact on sports. Unlike Lord Stanley's silver cup, Cartledge's was made of magnesium and its history remains obscure despite its enormous contributions to sports.

In 1956 one of the oldest houses in Guelph was torn down for parking lot construction on Quebec Street. It had housed Dr. Robert Ailing who succeeded John Gait as commissioner of the Canada Company. It was also home to the Cartledge family for half a century. Guelph had various textile factories and Joseph S. Cartledge kept an old shop at the rear of the house for his knitting machines.<sup>1</sup> Eventually in 1907, his son Joseph John Cartledge and his wife Bridget, nee Brandon, would found the Guelph Elastic Hosiery Company in a flat on William Street. With two employees, Mr. Cartledge operated the machinery while his wife fashioned the products. Business grew rapidly and the old south ward school on Waterloo Avenue soon housed the growing enterprise which by the 1920s employed forty. A further forty did contract work from their homes.<sup>2</sup>

The company specialized in made-to-measure surgical stockings. People with leg problems would write, specifying their requirements. Cartledge would acquire a pattern and weave a custom-fitted stocking. The contented customers praised Cartledge and he prospered. The company also made corsets, eye shades and a line of sweater coats.

Soon the next generation got involved, and sons Jack and George soon joined the firm. Jack, the extrovert, eventually designed the product that gave the firm world-wide recognition. Athletic, Jack was a good hockey, football and rugby player. Seeking new markets, the company introduced sports equipment lines. Taking counsel from local doctors and guided by his own experience, Jack invented a better athletic supporter. By 1920 he was ready to apply for a patent and in 1923 he received it and the Protex 13 exploded onto the market.<sup>3</sup>

The precursor of the modern athletic supporter was a rubber cotton canvas girdle worn for modesty purposes at public beaches in the 1860s. As sporting

# NEW GOVERNMENT APPROVED ITEMS AS PER SPECIFICATIONS

MIL-F-10400A, NOVEMBER 17, 1955

## NEW GOVERNMENT REQUIRED CHILDREN'S LIFE PRESERVERS (VEST TYPE)



No. 106

**No. 105**—Buoy-O-Boy Safety Vest, No. 1 Java Kapok in Vinyl heat-sealed inserts with 2 tie cords and understraps. Small Size—Supports 36 lbs.

**No. 106**—Buoy-O-Boy Safety Vest, No. 1 Java Kapok in Vinyl heat-sealed inserts with 2 tie cords and understraps. Medium Size—Supports 49 lbs.

**No. 107**—Buoy-O-Boy Safety Vest, No. 1 Java Kapok in Vinyl heat-sealed inserts with 2 tie cords and understraps. Large Size—Supports 79 lbs.

### Size Chart for above models

- Small**—For children weighing not more than 36 lbs.
- Medium**—For children weighing not more than 49 lbs.
- Large**—For children weighing not more than 79 lbs.



No. 104

## GOVERNMENT APPROVED ADULT VEST

**No. 103**—A New Adult Sports Waistcoat. Ideal for boating, water-skiing, fishing, etc. The No. 1 Java Kapok is fully enclosed in Vinyl envelopes which are heat-sealed, which retains buoyancy despite repeated wettings. Universal size. Covered with new Government specified material. Color: Green or Blue.

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## GOVERNMENT APPROVED NEW DESIGN CUSHION

**No. 58**—New Government approved cushion. No. 1 Java Kapok is sealed in 4 Vinyl bags to minimize the possibility of waterlogging with long strap for over-the-head and side tapes for around the body.

"Air Flight" leatherette covers in assorted colours: Red, Blue, Green, Yellow, etc.

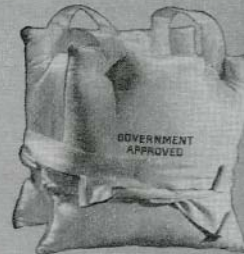
## GOVERNMENT APPROVED BUOY-O-BOY LIFE PRESERVER (Two-Pod Type)

Approved by  
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Guaranteed to pass  
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This life jacket is the perfect safety appliance for deep water emergencies. Easily, quickly adjustable to fit man, woman or child. Allows full freedom of movement.

**No. 41**—New, vermin-proof Life Saving Java Kapok filler, covered with strong white duck, lined with slip straps for instant use.



**SAFETY  
AND  
COMMON SENSE  
AFLOAT  
1956**

## GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS FOR LIFE SAVING APPLIANCES REQUIRED IN PLEASURE CRAFT

Reference — Canada Shipping Act

In motor driven pleasure yachts of not more than 26 feet in length, one approved lifejacket or one approved life saving cushion for each person on board;

In motor driven pleasure yachts of more than 26 feet in length, one approved lifejacket for each person on board;

In motor driven pleasure yachts of more than 20 feet in length, one approved lifebuoy;

In motor boats of the "Sea Flea" type, which are used exclusively for racing and carry only one person, the operator is required to wear a lifejacket at all times while the boat is being navigated.

GUELPH ELASTIC HOSIERY CO. LTD.  
GUELPH - - - ONTARIO

By 1956, The Guelph Elastic Hosiery Co. Ltd. was offering protection of another sort.

events grew in popularity athletes began to wear the items under their clothing rather than risk public lewdness charges. The Bike Web Manufacturing Company developed an athletic supporter in 1874 in response to requests from bicycle couriers pedalling over the rocky cobblestone streets of Boston. Known as the bicycle jockey strap it was patented in 1897. By 1992 the company had sold 300 million jock straps worldwide.<sup>4</sup>

The Protex 13 consisted of a waistband with a front pouch of hexagonal contour that was attached at the top and secured at the bottom by two inch wide elasticized strips that looped to the sides. The pouch contained a metal cup. The design was a success and by 1926 the potent company was grossing \$70,000.00 annually.<sup>5</sup> Soon the device was patented in several countries around the world. Its truly classic and practical design resisted change. Between the war years the Protex 13 gained world wide acceptance.

During the Protex 13's long season in the sun, Jack Cartledge was never less than frank about the pride he took in it. Honeymooning on a Carribean cruise ship, he entertained the captain's table on the first night out with an exhaustive description of the Protex 13. When the captain, among others, seemed slow to grasp the essential points, Cartledge followed the man back to his cabin after dinner, dropped his pants and demonstrated what his jockstrap could do in action. Finding it hard to speak eloquently and contort himself vigorously at the same time, he thereafter hired male models to demonstrate the jockstrap while he did the talking. At one such appearance at Hart House at the University of Toronto, Cartledge stood at the lectern while two male models flanked him, both redeemed from total nudity only by Protex 13s. According to oral historians in Guelph, Cartledge's lecture was more warmly received than that of the vice-chairman of the British Board of Trade who had spoken from the same platform a week earlier.<sup>6</sup>

The National Hockey League teams used the product. In 1935 the firm patented a lighter stronger magnesium alloy cup. The company held the patent rights until their expiry in 1956. In a 1927 advertisement from the former *Sporting Goods Journal of Canada*, the company's products were dubbed the "ultimate in attainment." The athletic supporter pictured was described as "a wide, all-elastic shaped jock strap, suitable for all purposes. The lowest price, guaranteed, all elastic jockstrap ever offered for sale. Sell at 50 cents."<sup>7</sup>

Unlike the old days when people sent in their measurements, the product was standardized and created on an assembly line. One size fit all with deluxe models with extra padding available for those in violent, hard- contact sports.

Eventually Jack Cartledge would own the company. Athletic support sales swelled, surpassing all other product lines. Prior to the Second World War, the company developed a two-pad life jacket made of kapok, a natural fibre from Thailand. With the post war boom in recreational pursuits the athletic supporter and the life jacket became the firm's two main products. The company expanded to become the largest athletic support company in Canada. The firm's Protex 13 dominated the market. The cup was improved with the advent of plastics in the 1950s. Jack Cartledge died August 6, 1957. His widow, Mrs.

061-M-0607. Price, pair, delivered..... 1.50      61-M-7228. Price, pair of harness..... 1.19

### CLARK'S LAMINATED HOCKEY STICKS

These better quality Hockey Sticks feature a splinter-resistant blade of selected Birch Plywood, laminated by a special press. Glued with a special waterproof, shock-resisting glue. After pressing, the plywood is cured for a week. Light-weight, clear-grained Ash handles. Well-seasoned to minimize weight and warp—heighten accuracy.

**7** "Custom-made," "Professional" and "Autograph" Sticks with straight-grained White Ash handle, Sply birch blade with National Hardwood seal. Handles are hand-rubbed. Lacquered 10 ins. up on shaft. About 53 ins. long. 061-M-0617. (7) "Custom-Made" Stick—a proven product with high-calibre hockey clubs. Price, delivered..... 2.75  
061-M-0618. (8) "Professional" Stick—widely used by top-flight senior and junior teams. Price, delivered..... 2.25  
061-M-0619. (9) "Autograph" Stick of durable quality, at a moderate price. Price..... 1.75

**10** "Official" Stick with nicely-grained White Ash handle and elm blade with special toe lamination. Lacquered 10 inches up on shaft. About 53 inches long. 061-M-0620. Price..... 1.25

**11** "Scorer" Stick with either White Ash or Elm handle and elm blade. Lacquered 8 inches up handle. About 48 inches long. An inexpensive stick recommended for boys. 061-M-0621. Price..... 85c

**12** "Pee-Wee Pro" Stick—graded especially for the youngster and very low in price. White Ash or Elm handle. Elm blade. Lacquered 8 inches up handle. From 36 to 40 inches long. 061-M-0622. Price..... 59c

**13** "Junior Pro" Goal Stick for the youthful netminder. White Ash handle from 42 to 48 inches long. Elm blade. Smoothly finished and lacquered to top of fins. 061-M-0623. Price..... 1.75

**14** "Hand-Made" Goal Stick for the high-calibre performer. About 50 to 53 inches long, with straight-grained White Ash handle and elm or hickory blade. Special toe lamination for strength. National Hardwood seal on blade. Lacquered to top of fins. Hand-rubbed handle for extra smoothness. 061-M-0624. Price, delivered..... 2.95

**15** Utility Kit Bag of tough (6-oz. weight), water-resistant Khaki Duck. About 30 by 12 inches. 61-M-7229. Price..... 1.98

**16** Official Puck. Regulation size and weight. 61-M-6148. Price..... 25c

**17** Junior "Pro" Puck for junior games. Diameter about 2 3/8 inches by 7/8 inch. 61-M-6149. Price..... 15c

**18** Special Hockey Stick Tape. Five yards of Polyken (trade mark) tape. Thin, waterproof. Good adhesion at low temperatures. 61-M-6147. Price, 8-yard roll..... 25c

**19** "Varsity" Athletic Support. A fine quality "Protex" product. Elastic waist-band and understraps. In sizes Small, Medium, Large. Please state size wanted. 61-M-5048. Price..... 1.50

**20** Fine Quality "O'Kee" Combination Cup Support. Padded Magnesium cup, wide web elastic waist-band and elastic leg straps. Be sure to state size wanted when you order. 61-M-5045. Sizes Small, Medium, Large. Price, del'd. 3.65

**21** "Protex" Athletic Support. Double-strength waistband and understraps. Sizes Small, Medium, Large. Be sure to state size wanted when ordering. 61-M-5047. Price..... 1.25

**22** Combination Athletic Supporter with felt-bound aluminum cup for protection. Cup fits into pocket with snap-fastening flap. Wide elastic waist-band (2 1/2-inch) and understraps. Sizes Small, Medium, Large. State size. 61-M-5046. Price, delivered 2.75

**506 EATON'S**      **It Pays to Shop by Mail from EATON'S.**      **MT**

Eaton's catalogue, Fall and Winter 1956-1957, page 506.

Collection: WCMA A1986.63

L.M. Cartledge, became president of the company and continued to juggle his assets. In June of 1958, she sold the business to Hugh Kent. George Cartledge continued as vice-president.<sup>8</sup>

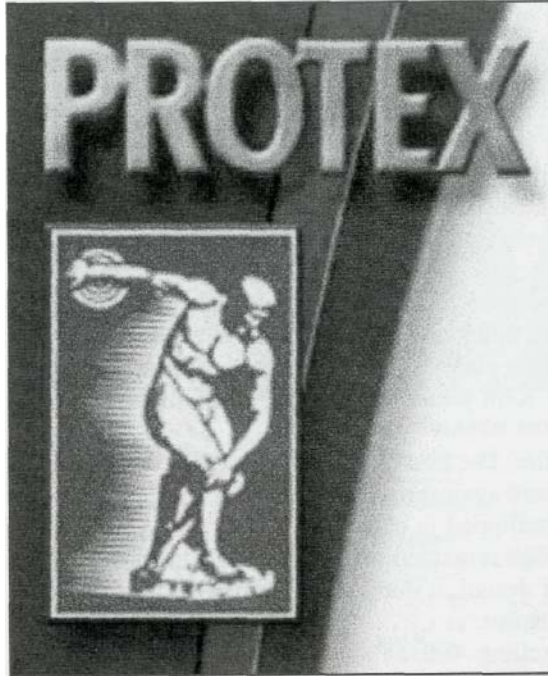
Hugh Kent served in World War Two as a captain with the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa, winning the Military Cross for valour. As vice-president of marketing for Warner-Lambert Canada Limited, he was a successful executive involved in salvaging the parent American company. At forty years of age, he was promoted president of Bromo-Seltzer Limited, a subsidiary. When a pharmaceutical conglomerate purchased the parent company, Kent sold his shares and purchased Guelph Elastic Hosiery. Kent also had an athletic background. His father and uncles, known as the Kent Four, were champion scullers. Their rowing club also fielded a football team and the Kent squad were members. Hugh Kent joined the Argonaut rowing club and became a good oarsman.

Kent made a good product better. The elastic was eventually replaced with Lycra to improve durability and guard against rotting. Cotton was discarded for spun polyester. The materials were dipped in chemicals to discourage fungus and bacteria. Cartledge's basic design remained because the waistband did not bunch up or roll over. A foolproof design, it dominated the market until sales flattened with new markets petering out.

By 1978 the company was selling 400,000 jock straps annually world wide. Any man who was anybody in sports was wearing a jockstrap from Guelph. The market was saturated. Sales softened, remaining static as non-contact sportsmen opted for garments with inner liners that provided support.

The company expanded its life jacket lines. In 1956 they secured a government contract to produce a life jacket. Eventually these evolved into modern personal flotation devices. In the late 1970s the company developed another first for the industry - a child size life jacket. Traditional jackets could drown a child as their large size forced the child's face down towards the water. The "Buoy-O-Boy" Marine Company, a division of Guelph Elastic Hosiery, was the first to have life jackets safety-approved in Canada specifically for children.<sup>9</sup> The company captured more market-share for its personal flotation devices by being an industry leader and taking advantage of new materials. By the late 1970s the company had 50 employees at a large three storey factory on Northumberland Street.<sup>10</sup> In 1981 a union was organized at the company. By 1986 the company had 80 workers and 25 home-based piece workers producing life jackets and jockstraps.<sup>11</sup>

In 1990 the firm expanded again locating in a new 2.5 million dollar, 60,000 square foot facility on Speedvale Avenue. The firm renamed itself Protexion Products in 1987 in honour of its mainstay product and to reflect its modern technologies. Elastic had long since been replaced by synthetic materials for increased comfort and protection. The new facility would accommodate the company's 140 employees and modern computerized machinery. The railway line accessed the rear of the property. The firm had contracts throughout North America, Europe and Japan. Life jackets and athletic supporters were the



mainstay with the firm researching a "Jill Strap" to gain a share in the increasing female sports market<sup>12</sup>

In 1997 the firm was purchased by Jolina Capital of Montreal. In 2002, Dave Kent (oldest son of Hugh Kent, and a former Protexion Products president) acquired the athletic support division of the firm. The new company, Protex Athletics Inc., shared space with its parent company until November of 2002 when it moved to Cambridge. Sadly, Guelph's ties to the jockstrap were severed. The new company aggressively sought more American market-share, creating several new patents in 2003. Dave Kent described the innovations as the

biggest changes in the industry in 25 years.<sup>13</sup> Protexion Products still manufactures life jackets in Guelph. The new athletic company still uses the original logo, developed by Jack Cartledge, of a Greek discus thrower on all its products.

The Royal City was home to Canada's most popular sports cup. Jack Cartledge's hosiery firm innovated the first Canadian jockstrap. The Protex 13 story is a strong uplifting chapter in Guelph's business history.

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Shirley Campbell, ca.1950.

Photo: WCMA ph 4663

# Masters victory puts *Fergus Flash* back in the splash

*by Gregory Oakes*

After 30 years, the Fergus Flash is back in the splash.

Shirley Campbell, the Fergus native who made worldwide waves in the '50s, won a gold medal at the 1988 World Masters Swimming Championships in Brisbane, Australia.

It all began at the age of six when Campbell started swimming at the pool W.G. Beatty built for Fergus. The St. David Street facility was heated with steam from the Beatty factory, something few communities the size of Fergus could boast of. Also, M.J. Beatty recruited Edmonton's Bert Crockett, a prominent swimming coach.

Campbell's father died when she was only six and, because he worked for Beatty, her family was given a pool membership.

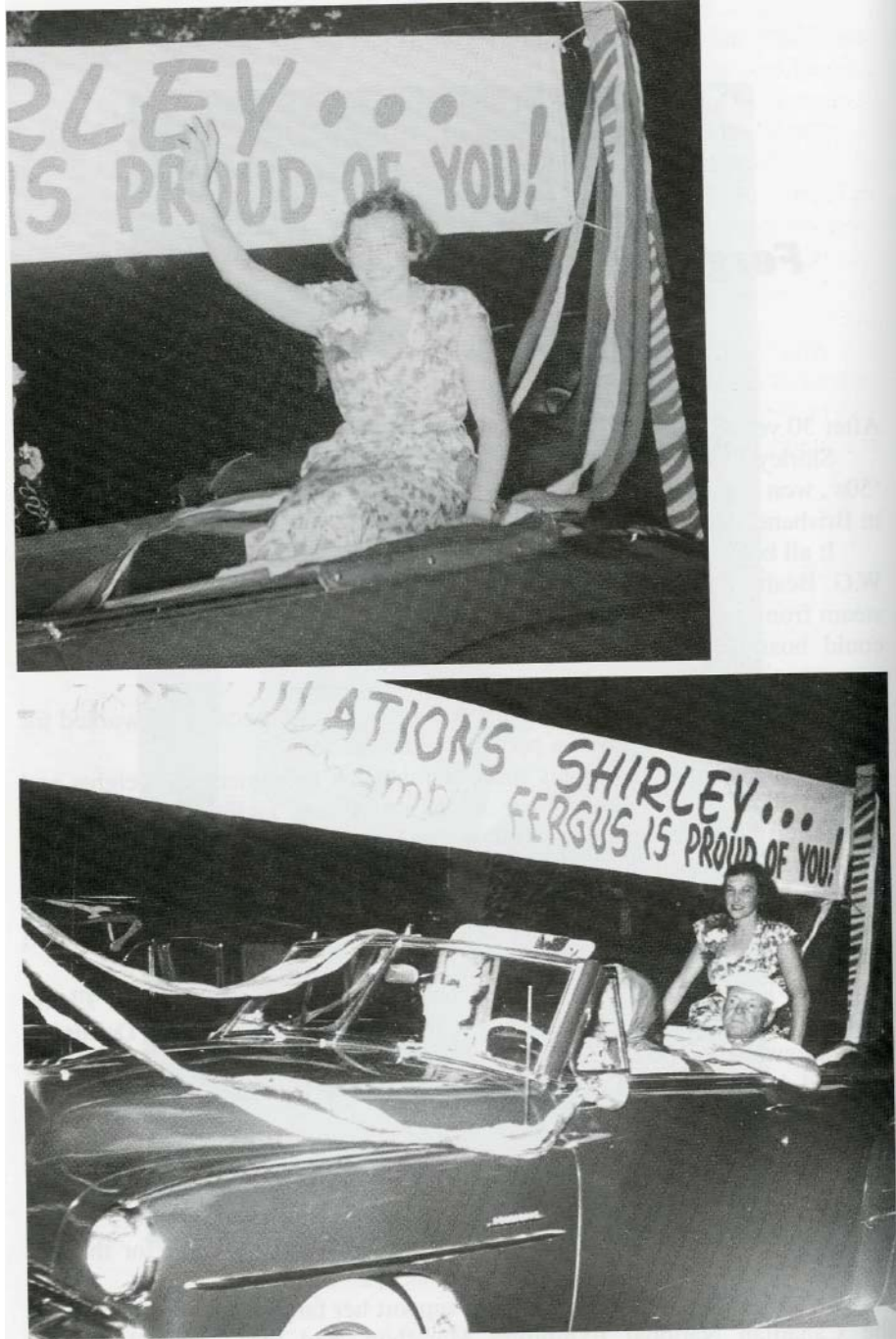
Crockett was ahead of his time, training his swimmers on weights and making them swim with rubber boots on. Prime facilities and superior instruction produced many champions for Fergus. By age 10, Campbell had won Ontario competitions in Toronto.

Her long winter days would begin at 6 am with skating and end with one night a week at the indoor pool in Guelph. The Fergus pool would not be heated until March. During summer vacation, she would swim three miles a day.

On 31 March 1952, Campbell teamed with her sister Joan, Elaine Chapman, and Doreen Howatt to win the 400-yard relay of the Dominion Championship by 100 feet. She also won the 400-yard individual event, setting a record despite being ill with the flu. Her 5:13 mark remained untouched for a long time.

However, Campbell did not qualify for the Canadian Olympic team that year. She had a temperature of 102 degrees and lost by one-fifth of a second to Gladys Priestly, who went on to Helsinki. In those days, swimmers retired young and Campbell would have been considered over the hill for the '56 Games.

So, she turned professional to help support her family and twice won both the Canadian National Exhibition Marathon, and the three-mile World Championship, netting \$1,650 for the latter accomplishment - big bucks back then.



Shirley Campbell at awards reception, 1952.

Photo: WCMA ph 6604 (top)  
WCMA ph 9707 (bottom)

As she recalls, "Mother could not swim and was terrified of the ocean, so she would not sign my release forms so I could go to Atlantic City for a competition with swimming coach Gus Ryder. Marilyn Bell won that, then swam Lake Ontario in '54, and the rest is history."

Campbell first attempted to swim Lake Ontario in 1955.

As charted by the *Toronto Telegram*, she had favourable weather conditions to begin with. However a *Telegram* reporter knocked her guide boat's compass overboard and by next morning the navigator admitted he was lost. She swam two miles west off course, then three miles east.

"I saw the captain of the *Cayuga*, a lake charter, and he figured I swam 42 miles."

After 19 hours, and facing 10-foot waves as the weather deteriorated, she got out of the water.

In 1956, however, Campbell tried again and, and had she made it, the gifts and media possibilities would have made her rich and famous. The *Toronto Star* sponsored her, bringing Crockett out of retirement from British Columbia.

She began extensive training in early spring by swimming in rivers about Toronto. In turn, the *Star* hired a Navy navigator and a good boat.

Crockett scouted her path on race day and returned to Toronto exhausted. He was in his 70s and had never been on a swim longer than 10 miles, so after 12 hours in the boat he was too tired to continue.

The swim was delayed until 10 pm.

"I managed 31.5 miles in water ranging from 49 degrees to 69 degrees. I was cold and tired but could see Cherry Beach and could have made it to the Toronto Islands," she says.

Dead in the water, one of the crew gave her a shot of brandy - her first drink.

A half-mile from the shore she climbed into the boat, too fatigued to finish. The *Toronto Star* paid her contract anyway and she received thousands of dollars worth of presents.

Campbell retired frustrated and disappointed from swimming. She married and moved to a Renfrew farm, away from the limelight. She became a real estate agent and raised a family.

By 1975, however, she was drinking heavily, a habit dating from her second swim. Her marriage deteriorated, she and her husband separated, and she sank into depression. A doctor prescribed Valium, which culminated six years later when she awoke in the psychiatric ward at St. Michael's Hospital. She managed to regain control until four years later when her husband died of cancer. This time, she entered a clinic for extensive detoxification treatment which ended two years ago.

A positive twist came in 1985 when she met some old friends who persuaded her to train for the Masters Games. Her daughter was attending University of Florida at the time and Campbell began training for a spot with a team in St. Petersburg, where she has a home.

"I needed a challenge," she says. "It felt great."

She won a medal at Brisbane in the 200-metre freestyle relay. Overall, more than 3700 swimmers competed in the games.

"In the 100-metre freestyle, I had a time of 1:22 and came in seventh out of 128 people, although I was seeded 19th, she says, adding, "I shortened my stroke, cutting my time in the 50-metre to 35 seconds, and just four off the world record for my age group."

Now, she trains every day at Toronto's Central Y. A successful businesswoman also, Campbell remains busy. Any disappointment about her prior swimming career is far behind her.

"I'm not sorry, I take a good look at where I'm going and who I am," she says, "I'm more proud of my Australian gold and I'm looking forward to Rio in '90."

As for the place where it all began, she holds warm memories.

"Fergus is a wonderful place to grow up. I'd have never made it as a swimmer anywhere else."

*Reprinted with permission from the Guelph Daily Mercury, 31 January 1989. At that time, author Greg Oakes was a young law student, earning spare change as he put himself through Osgoode Hall. He remembers meeting Shirley Campbell at the Ibis Hotel, on Jarvis Street, Toronto; the interview took place in a room filled with swimming trophies.*

## **"Alf Couling's Swimmin' Hole" Swimming in Eramosa Township: 1945-1955**

*by Helen Goodall*

Warm summer afternoons drew the children of Eramosa township's 6<sup>th</sup> line community to Alf Couling's Swimmin' Hole. They came after hoeing turnips or stacking bales on a wagon for fun together and a refreshing dip in the green, cedar-stained waters. They came by bike, on foot (often bare), and sometimes on the back of a sturdy work-horse. Although going to the swimming pool in Fergus was a special treat, and visits to Hindley's Pond, Wheeler's Mill, Hortop's Millpond in Everton, and Henderson's Dam in Rockwood were an exciting change, they required a car for transportation. Alf Couling's Swimmin' Hole, a widening in Luttrell Creek, was the most popular community gathering place for young folks in the '40s and '50s.

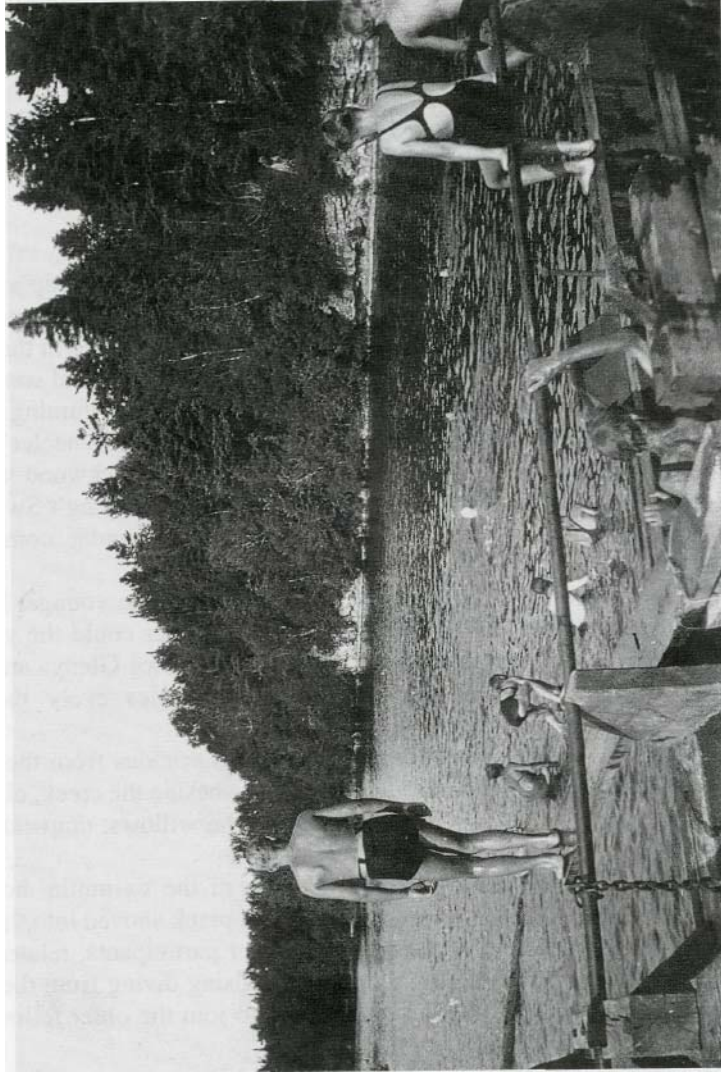
The older children were responsible for supervising the younger kids. If the older McDougall girls couldn't go swimming, neither could the younger Comfort children. They were too young to go alone. Since Glenys and Ruth McDougall were required to perform household duties every morning, swimming was for the afternoon.

One former swimmer, Anna Moyer, remembers prickles from the straw-stubble as she walked bare-foot through the pasture beside the creek, climbing the rail fence and then pushing her way through the willows, dogwoods and cedars that edged the creek.

Beside the one large cedar tree on the bank of the swimmin' hole, the bigger boys had made a crude diving-board from a plank shoved into the earth of the bank. Ernie McDougall, one of the younger participants, relates overcoming his initial fear of diving by secretly practising diving from the board with his pal, Alan Comfort. When it came time to join the older fellows, the two smaller boys dove in confidently.

Ted Buczek recalls the excitement of skinny-dipping at noon-hour with the other lads from nearby S.S. #6, Eramosa. In return for permission to enjoy this treat, the boys promised to behave for their teacher. Ted's attempt to deepen the water by constructing a dam of stones across the outlet of the pond met with failure, despite his patient trips bearing rocks and building the barrier.

Margaret McDougall's teacher, Mrs. Black, took the whole school to Alf's



Swimming at Hortop's millpond, Eramosa River, Everton, ca.1940. Notice the diving board attached to dam.

Photo WCMA ph 15887



Alf Couling's Swimmin' Hole, 2003.

Photo courtesy C. Ernest McDougall.

Swimmin' Hole and taught them how to swim. They all passed their swimming lessons in one session!

Martha Comfort remembers learning to swim by easing into the water, sinking her hands into the mud, pushing off into deeper water and dog-paddling back to shore. She repeated this process many times until she could really swim.

Deep cuts caused by hidden glass plagued several of the children. Mary Comfort helped her brother, Alan, limp the half-mile back home after he suffered a cut that exposed the bone in his leg. The cut required stitches. The scar remains, 50 years later.

No one can forget the mud and the cows! On the north side of the hole, there was a low, muddy area where the cows came down to drink. Hoof-prints of cattle mingled with footprints of the children who entered the murky water from this shallow spot. The kids often slathered their bodies with this mystery mud, and then dashed into the water to rinse it off.

The Eramosa River at Hortop's Mill in Everton, and the millpond at Wheeler's Mill on the 3<sup>rd</sup> line were special swimming places, visited less frequently. Isabel Wheeler tells how her big yellow dog, Pepi, would steal the swimmers' shoes when they were in the water, and take them to the house. They would have to come and retrieve the shoes. Isabel says having all these young people come to swim broadened her horizons and social life.



"6th Line Kids" / "Luttrell Creek Kids", 15 April 2004. Left to right: Frances (Comfort) Temple; Mary (Comfort) Rowan; Helen (Moyer) Goodall; Anna (Moyer) Wilhelm; Glenys (McDougall) Baxter; C. Ernest McDougall,

Photo courtesy Judy McDougall.

Jerry Saunders with his older brothers, Robbie and Dick, arrived at Wheeler's Mill one Sunday afternoon, their homemade canoe loaded onto the roof of Robbie's car. Gordon and Morley Millson challenged the Saunders boys to a race against their 14-foot aluminum boat with its small outboard motor. Even though the canoe was in the lead with the boys paddling as hard as they could, the aluminum boat gradually overtook them and won the race. The prize was to be a ride in the aluminum boat, and Millsons gave the Saunders' boys a ride even though they lost the race.

Ron Goodall's jump off the floating dock in the middle of the millpond caused him a big bump on his head when he surfaced quickly **underneath** the dock. He still remembers his feeling of panic as he gasped for air.

Alf Couling's Swimmin' Hole has disappeared, now. Four 'kids,' now in their 60s, couldn't find it on their nostalgic visit to Luttrell Creek recently. Their own children all grew up in Wellington County with a variety of swimming experiences: backyard pools; larger public pools in Fergus and in Guelph. These later generations learned to swim in structured lessons. The water of their pools was chlorinated. They rarely walked, and were never unsupervised.

There is definitely change. Progress is questionable, but the skirl of children's laughter still echoes over the green water of Luttrell Creek.

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Wilhelm (nee Moyer), Anna

Goodall, Helen: telephone conversations with Ted Buczek; C. Ernest McDougall. Goodall, Helen: interviews with Glenys Baxter; Ron Goodall; C. Ernest McDougall; Mary Rowan; Frances Temple; Anna Wilhelm.



Gussie Noecker (left) and Annie Doyle (right), from Drayton.

Photo: J.W. Webster, Elora, ca.1910. WCMA ph 8809.

## **Sports**

In the winter of 1864, a Fergus newspaper editor glanced down upon the hallowed surface of the Grand River where the storied Fergus Curling Club slid their first rocks and, much to his horror, saw several females ice-skating in full public view. Where would all this lead to, he asked his unsuspecting readers?

Almost a century and a half later, at its first meeting in September 2004, the Publication Committee for Volume 18 discussed several sports articles to complement its major essay on the Fergus Highland Games. We found little that tickled our fancy.

In October we wondered about an over-arching article on sportsmen and sportswomen throughout the County. One author told us he thought that would be impossible, "a gloss article would have to run a lot of pages." By November we had decided on a photo-feature and set about choosing the illustrations. Faced with a plethora, our minutes of January noted "Does there have to be a team to be a sport? Is competition a necessary component? Where is the line between sport and recreation? While no conclusive agreement was reached, most sensed that a good photo would have action and tell a story."

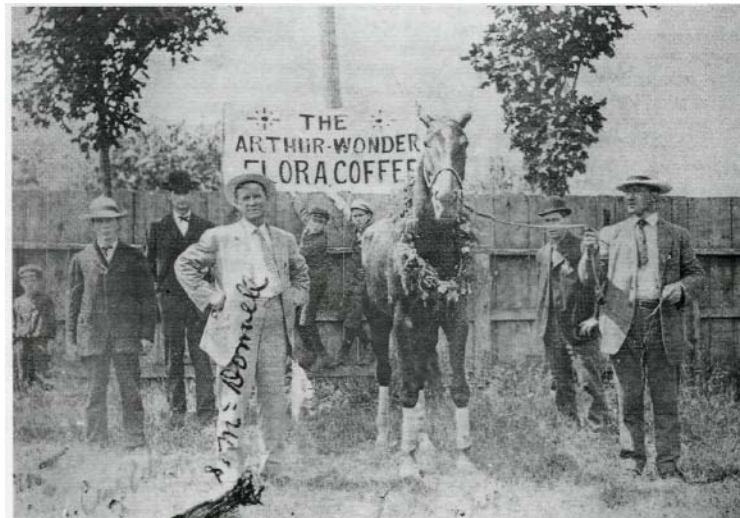
So several of us searched through the database of over 20,000 images at the Wellington County Museum and Archives. We ask you to be the judge of the result. We hope to raise some questions, if not sensibilities.

Today I looked at the sports section of a Toronto newspaper, and one from Kitchener. Neither was running photos of women (though lots of men); perhaps women's sport only makes the headlines when it breaks another social barrier. And we thought women were half the population.

Helen Goodall  
Al Koop  
Ian Easterbrook



Alpha Yeomans and friends play tennis in Mount Forest, ca.1900.  
Photo: WCMA ph 1441.



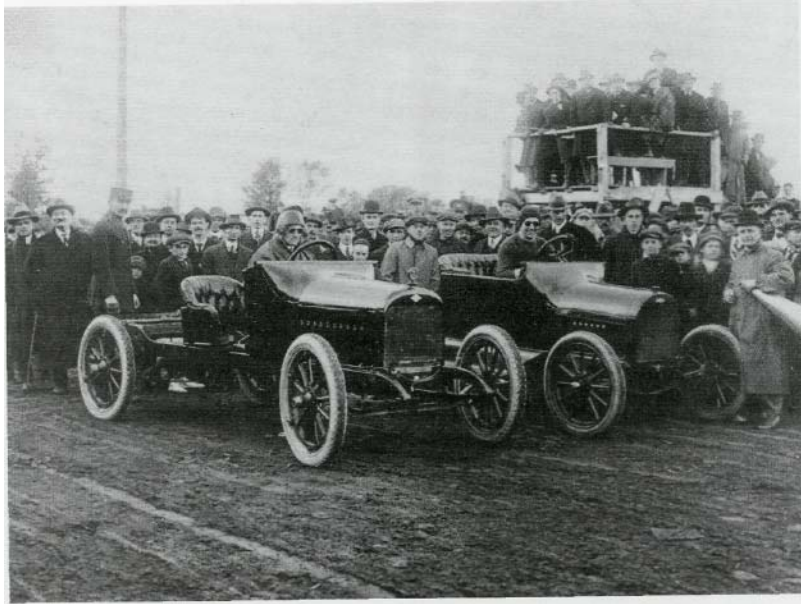
Mr. S. McDonnell, with The Arthur Wonder - Elora Coffee, ca.1900.  
WCMA ph 9477.



Members of the Fergus Curling Club, 1899.

Photo: WCMA ph 586.

*"Hurray for the curlin',  
Here's tae the curlin',  
Hip-hp-hurray! For the game wi' the stanes,  
The roar and the ring o' t,  
The dunt, and the ding o't,  
The whirl, and the bir-r-rl, and the dirl o' the stanes."- Weir*



Auto racing in Guelph. Stan Tolton and Mayor, Beverly Robinson at Exhibition Park, ca.1920. Photo: WCMA ph 10928.

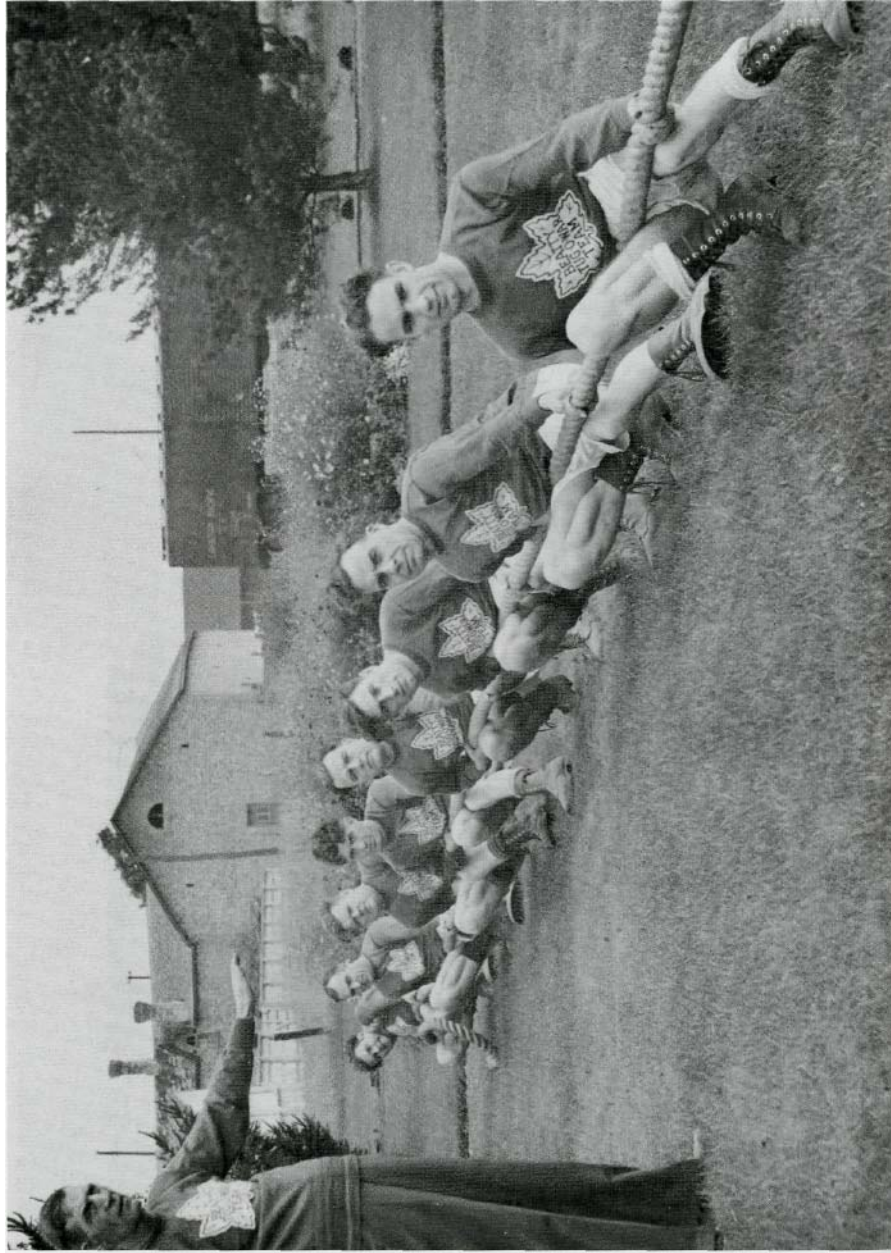


Hunters, hounds and rabbits, Mount Forest, ca.1920. Photo: WCMA ph 1526



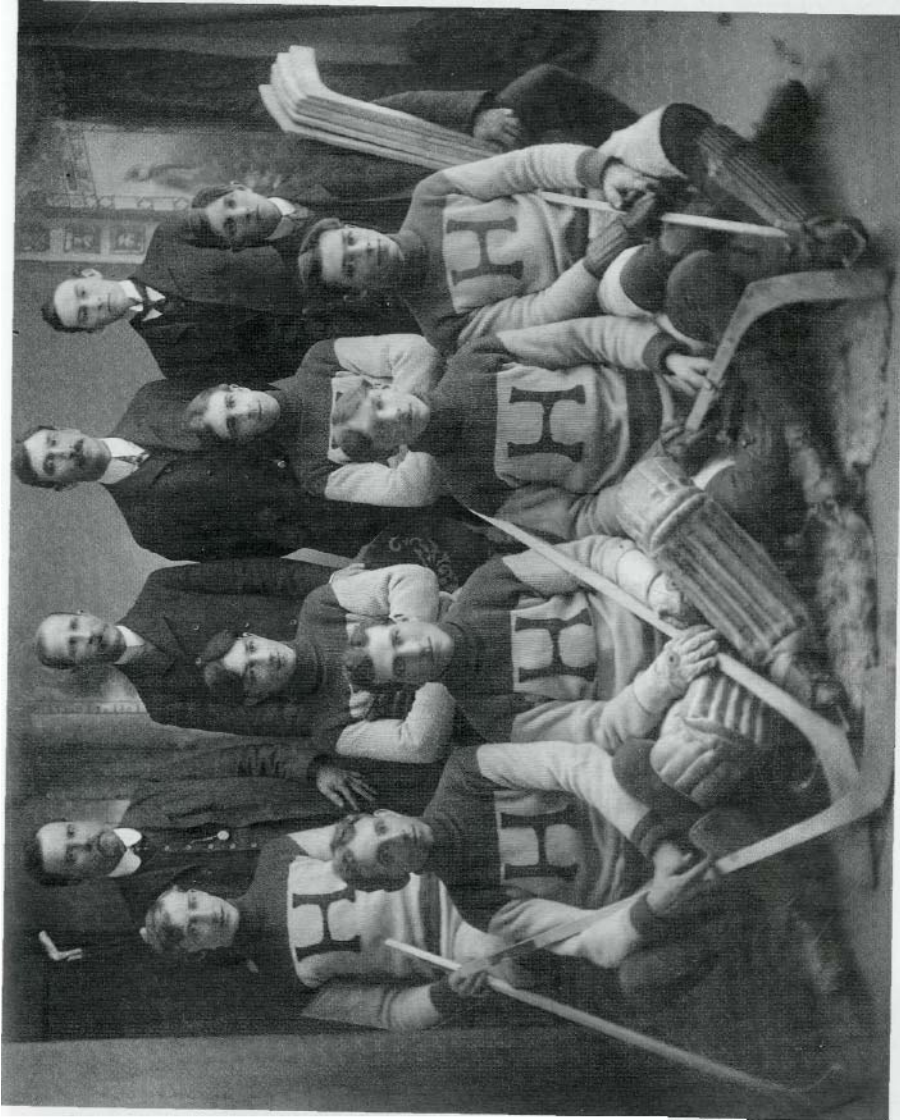
Snowshoeing in Mount Forest, ca.1920.

Photo: WCMA ph 1537.



The Beatty Tug-O-War Team, 1942.

Photo: WCMA ph 14597.



Harriston Northern League Hockey Team, winners of District 2 season, 1905.

Photo: WCMA ph 14405.



Clifford Swing Skirts, after winning the Western Ontario Athletic Association Softball Championships, 1947. Photo: WCMAph 18484.

From the Burgess-Marucci-Loree family collection, ca.1925. Photo: WCMA ph 18735.



Beatty Brothers, Fergus, soccer teams, ca.1942. Photo: WCMA ph 6689.

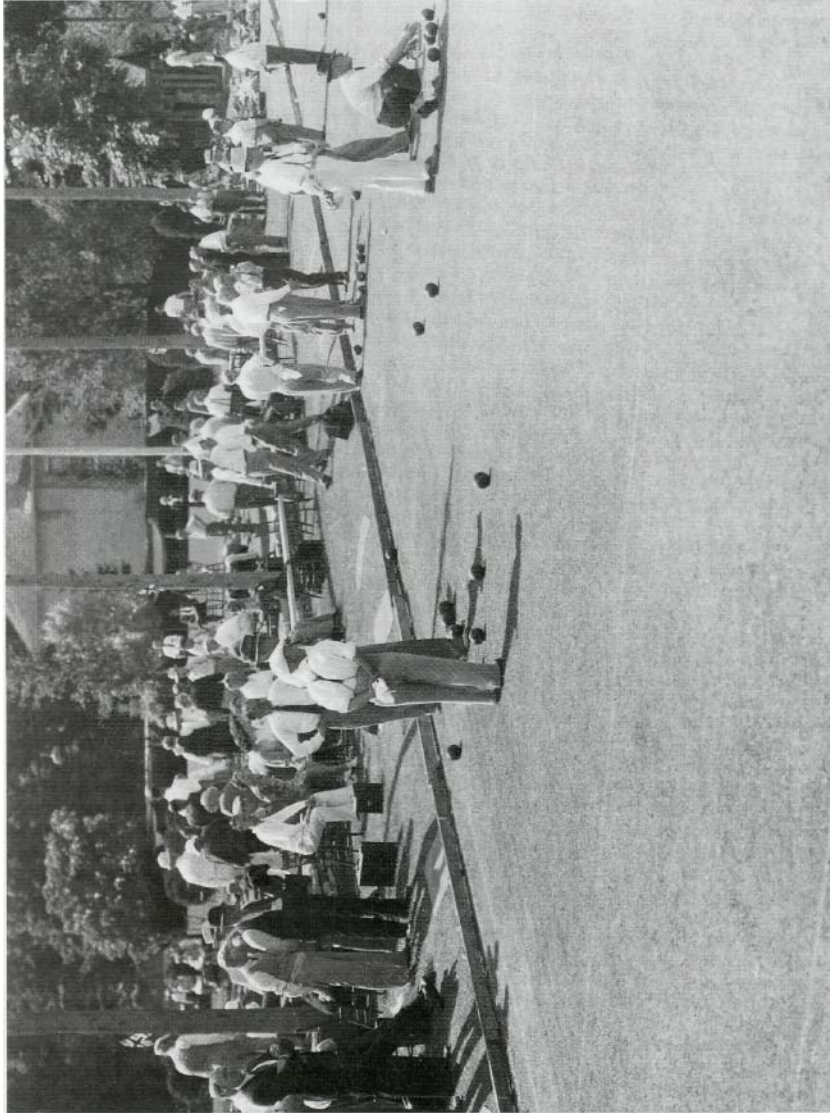
Lizzie and Drummond Yeomans on croquet lawn, Mount Forest, ca.1905. *The Bora Observer* of 10 July 1870 reported that: "on Sunday last, there was a game of croquet played within a few feet of the house of one of the magnates, thus shocking the moral sense of the neighbours."

Photo: WCMA ph 3145.



Lorraine Johnston and friend, with golf clubs, Fergus, ca.1940.

Photo: WCMA ph 4645.



The second lawn bowling green at Elora, on David Street, ca.1930.

Photo: WCMA ph 3709.



Crieff baseball team, Puslinch Township, 1897.

Photo: WCMA ph 398.



Women, riding motorcycle and sidecar, Harriston, ca.1920.

Photo: WCMA ph 4310.



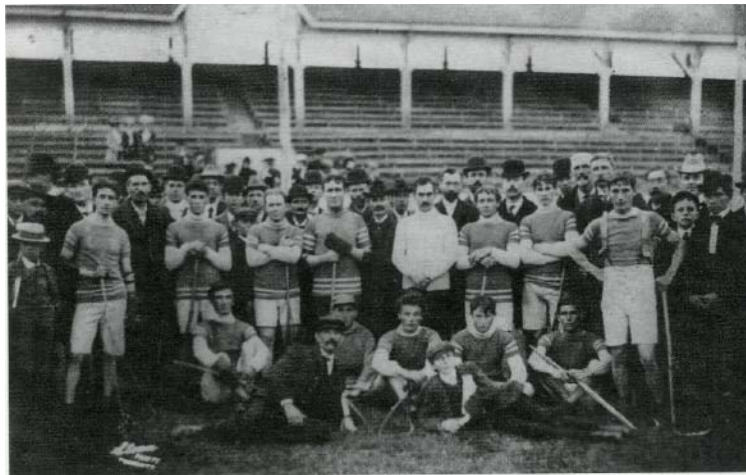
Harriston women's softball team, 1924.

Photo: WCMA ph 4367.



This image of pleasure boating came from the Ransom family, West Garafraxa, Ca.1910.

Photo: WCMA ph 5600.



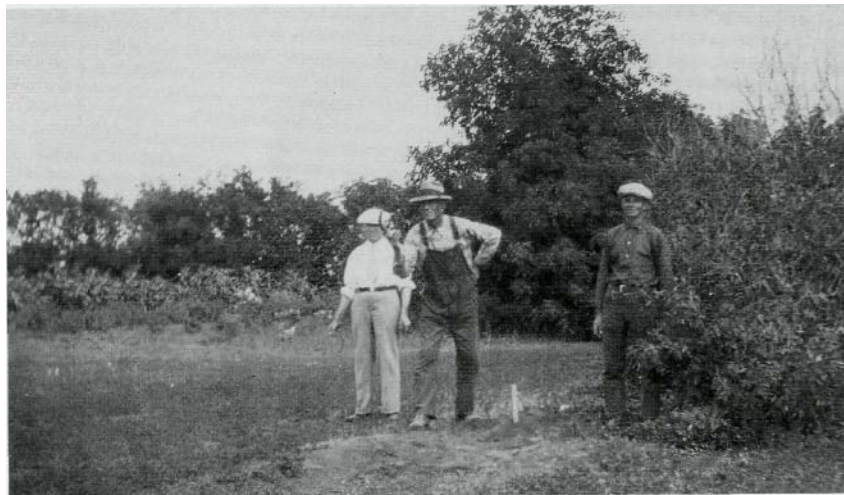
The Fergus Lacrosse Team, International Champions, 1902.

Photo: WCMA ph 4699.



Guelph cricketers, ca,1900.

Photo: WCMA ph 440.



Three men playing horseshoes, presumed to be members of the Ransom family,  
West Garafraxa Township, ca.1910.

Photo: WCMA ph 5608.



Skaters at an outdoor rink in Harriston or Clifford, ca.1920.

Photo: WCMA ph 4155, ph 4156.



Damascus girl's ball team, before the turn of the century.

Photo: WCMA ph 9573.

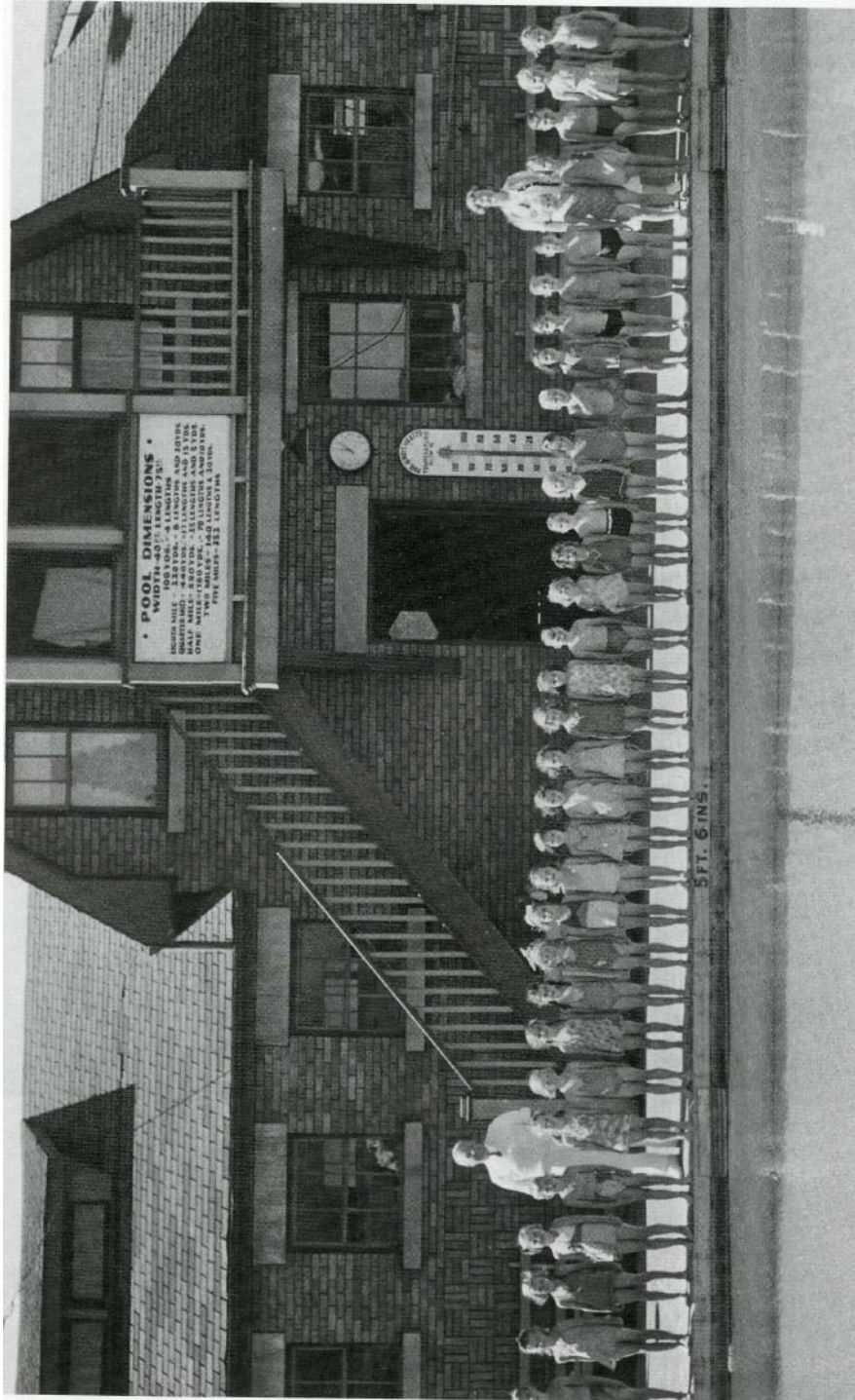


Arthur District High School junior girls basketball team, CWOSSA B champions, 1969.

Photo: WCMA ph 9575.

Young swimmers at the Fergus pool, "given to the town of Fergus by W.G. Beatty and M.J. Beatty who built and operated the pool from 1930-1961 for the betterment of young and old".

Photo: WCMA 6643.



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## Our Contributors

**Cindy Clow Danton** moved to Wellington County in 1977, to take up a position as cataloguer at the Wellington County Museum, along with Michelle McMillan and Al Koop. She had done extensive research on this area and fallen in love with its old stone buildings. She left the Museum and Archives in 1981 to pursue a graduate degree in Scottish Studies at the University of Guelph, but still likes to stay in touch with her former colleagues at the Museum/Archives and volunteers in the Wellington County Historical Research Society.

**Al Koop** and his wife Sheila operated a sheep farm near Living Springs. Together they researched, conducted interviews and edited *Older Voices Among Us: Listening to the Longtime Residents of Wellington County* (1980). A graduate of the University of Waterloo, he now works in the field of education and performance-based training. Al and his family moved to Elora several years ago.

**Wayne Hepburn** was born in Toronto. He attended University of Guelph where he holds undergraduate degrees in History, and in Philosophy. He received his B.Ed, and now teaches French and History in Caledon.

**Greg Oakes** is a lawyer. In addition with his wife, Sonja, he operates a hypo-allergenic curly horse breeding facility in Guelph-Eramosa Township. This year they built an indoor riding arena and they offer the world's first hypo-allergenic indoor horse riding facility.

**Helen Goodall** still has a passion for cedar-edged Luttrell Creek and is delighted that 'the best part of her life' has been spent in Wellington County.

Again, our gratitude to Wayne Bridge and James Gow who have read the manuscript at its later stages to catch typographic mistakes and egregious errors. Credits for the illustrations appear in the captions for example [Wellington County Museum and Archives] *WCMA ph 1234*. Digital scanning courtesy of Karen Wagner, Archivist and Phil Dietrich, Preparator, Wellington County Museum and Archives. Cover illustration of the 1946 programme of the Highland Games courtesy of Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games. Rear cover illustration, the front of the *Star Weekly*, 14 January 1956, courtesy of the Toronto Star Archives. Printing: Ampersand, Guelph.

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The editors welcome for publication articles relating to  
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July 14, 1956

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