

Heritage Renfrew

Renfrew Ontario

May 2, 1988

*** NEWSLETTER ***

Greetings;

One of the purposes of this newsletter is to bring you up-to-date with the situation concerning our archival storage. Heritage Renfrew has a considerable amount of archival material entrusted to it, including the back issues of the Mercury, old photos, personal papers, etc. Some of this material has been held in the basement of the town offices in a relatively controlled environment, and the rest, including the back issues of the Mercury, has been in storage above the Program Centre of the Library. About two months ago, Heritage Renfrew received notice from the Library that the area above the Program Centre would have to be vacated, with no reason given, either on receipt of the notice or on request afterwards. Heritage Renfrew had also offered to assist in the cost of renovation of the area above the Program Centre, in order to make available to the public the materials held by us, but that offer was also turned down.

We are presently engaged in searching for a suitable place of storage, but the quest could be made much easier if we knew of the available locations. Therefore, we are asking for your help. If you happen to know of a building or a room in town which is presently unused, and suitable for both storage and work-table, please let any of the directors know, and your suggestion will be gratefully considered. This is a relatively urgent matter, and speedy replies would be appreciated.

Les Church - President

COMING EVENTS - [Please mark these on your calendar!!]

Thursday, May 12..at 7 p.m.--the unveiling of a commemorative plaque at the O'Brien Apartments, formerly the O'Brien Opera House, to honour the memory of M.J.O'Brien, benefactor of our town. O'Brien Family descendants will be present for a short ceremony, followed by a social hour in the Masonic Hall.

Thursday, June 9th..at 7 p.m.--meet at Stewart Park for a conducted walk to see historic houses on Raglan Street S.

There is still some confusion in the minds of several citizens about the roles of the Renfrew Historical Society, Heritage Renfrew, and L.A.C.A.C. Whenever the subject comes up will you do your part in enlightening them?

There was a move on foot to unite the first two of these groups, but the individuals in each of them have worked separately for so long, and with separate budgets and grants, that little change would be effected apart from having a single name. The Historical Society is in reality the operators of the McDougal Mill Museum. Heritage Renfrew's members do historical research and are responsible for archival materials. We co-operate with each other on fund-raising activities.

Last year, Heritage Renfrew provided the arguments, based on the history only, of Bonnington House for L.A.C.A.C. to use in its case for the preservation of the building.

IT WAS L.A.C.A.C., AND CERTAINLY NOT HERITAGE RENFREW THAT CAME OUT THE LOSER IN THE CONTROVERSY, AND SINCE THEN FOR ALL PRACTICAL PURPOSES L.A.C.A.C. HAS BEEN DESTROYED IN RENFREW BY RECENT VOTE OF THE TOWN COUNCIL.

Heritage Renfrew is alive and well. Membership stands at close to two hundred. Only two of our members declined to renew membership this year "because of the stand you took on Bonnington House" We appreciate the continued support of so many of our citizens who understand our true position in the controversy.

Les Anderson

Here are some of our current activities:-----

1. It was President Les Church and directors Dorothy Skinner and Harry Hinchley who were the contacts for Citizen reporter Marjorie Gillies when she came to our town to take pictures of historic homes and do the write-up which you saw in the Saturday edition of the Citizen recently, entitled "Renfrew"
2. The architectural booklet for which Marjorie Lindsay and assistants have been doing research is soon to be published, The first of a series of booklets will feature the work of Moses Chamberlain Edey and W.E.Nofke.
3. Honorary President Harry Hinchley has prepared the wording of the plaque in memory of M.J.O'Brien, and has secured approval for it from the Ministry of Culture and Communication. This is necessary before a grant can be received for defraying part of the cost involved.

4. We value the membership and support of Brenda Lee-Whiting, author of the popular 'Harvest of Stones'. She is now preparing material for a book on the Polish settlers of Renfrew County, and will find that there will be a wide readership for it. Hats off also to our Carol Bennett, who has researched and published her book on the Irish of 'Peter Robinson's Settlement'. Rather than take a 'breather', she has already begun collecting material on families of Scottish descent.

5. President Les Church and Aldene are providing Renfrewites, and untold numbers of descendants of Renfrew pioneers now living elsewhere with a valuable key to finding information about their forebears. In case you are still unaware of what they have done, go to the Library or the local bookstores and ask for their 'Births, Marriages and Deaths; Abstracts From the Renfrew Mercury' series. To date they have published 3 booklets of information, starting in 1871 when the Mercury was founded. To date they have completed the listings to 1915. These are also available at the Church's home.

THE LEGEND OF GREY OWL LIVES ON AFTER FIFTY YEARS

It was the biggest scoop in Canadian history, but it would have to wait three years. It involved a Canadian folk hero. He claimed to be an Indian telling the world about the importance of conservation. He also wrote best selling books, had a national following, but in reality was no Indian at all.

It is now fifty years since the death of Archie Belaney, the man who had the world believing he was a full-blooded Indian, Grey Owl.

Grey Owl lectured across North America voicing his concern about conservation. He was presented to the Royal Family in England, including a very young Princess Elizabeth. His true identity was known to only three men.

Born in Hastings, England, Mr. Belaney came to Canada in 1905 and settled near Cobalt. There he married an Indian girl named Angele who taught the Englishman the ways of the Canadian Indian. Belaney was adopted into the tribe and was given the name Grey Owl.

He left Angele shortly after the marriage and served with the infantry during the First World War. Returning to Canada he completely adopted the Indian way of life, claiming that his ancestry was part Apache and part Scottish.

In 1925 he married Gertrude Bernard, a Mohawk, and lived in the Temagami area. It was at this time that he began his campaign for conservation. Newspapers featured his articles, complete with pictures of Grey Owl in Indian head-dress and feeding an orphan beaver, or mending the broken wing of a bird. Grey Owl can be credited with implanting a new consciousness, quite current to-day, that man is a partner with birds and animals in sharing our environment.

In 1935 Britt Jessup, a reporter with the North Bay Nugget received a tip that Grey Owl was really an Englishman. Travelling to Temagami, he spoke with Grey Owl's first wife, Angele, who told him the truth about Archie Belaney.

Returning to North Bay with one of the biggest scoops in Canadian history. Mr. Jessup reported to Editor Eddie Bunyan. At this time, Grey Owl was at the height of his fame, and not wishing to expose Grey Owl, Mr. Bunyan "sat" on the story until Grey Owl died in April 1938.

Although Grey Owl lived in constant fear that someone might discover his secret, his features, combined with a braid of long, black hair and his ever-present buckskins, gave hardly a clue to his real identity.

Courtesy North Bay Nugget.

Ed. L.A.

***** Remember the COMING EVENTS *****