

OPEONGO LINES

The Voice of Heritage Renfrew

Saving Yesterday for Tomorrow

September 1996



- "Dearie, have you seen Heritage Renfrew's September Opeongo Lines?"
- "No, pray tell, what's in it?"

Two of our ancestors at their other evening devotions

The 19th century temperance movement was keenly supported by many Catholics. However there was much less support for total abstinence and the clergy recognised that for the poor pubs provided warmth, comfort and conviviality - in stark contrast to many bare, unheated, insanitary homes

We stole this sketch (and the original inscription under our irreverent caption) from the Feb 1996 cover of *Catholic Ancestor*, which is published in England where, some say, satirical newspaper cartoons were born.

The ladies, and especially the inscription explaining the significance of the pub scene, remind us that those ancestors who joined local "Temperance Societies" and preached total abstinence instead gave 'temperance' a bad name. They remind us that there could be a valid gray scale between black and white extremes and that even some clergy were realists enough to find reasons to endorse that middleground. They remind us that the English pub was a different place than was the North American hotel; it was more of a social gathering place than an exclusive watering hole for males. The picture and inscription also remind us that in Cardiff and Liverpool especially (where this scene probably took place) the Irish Famine of 150 years ago caused a great influx of destitute immigrants who died, stayed, or just stopped over long enough to get a ship for the Americas. Their mere presence had a great effect on religious, social, political and economic life in England and in the colonies.

Because social workers, philanthropists and religious zealots, often held these extreme views they often labelled "temperate" drinkers "drunkards" simply because they were seen in a pub or occasionally "bent an elbow". And if that happened a few decades later, and the imbibers had children, police and social agencies could take the tots from them and send the kids out of the country - often without parental knowledge or permission. As a result, when Home Children and their descendants finally track down their personal records today they often have to read between the lines or have someone explain why degrading and caustic remarks could be made by some so-called social workers. In England, such personal files are seldom released unless a social worker brings them to the Home Child or descendant personally and explains that the derogatory comments all too often reflect the prejudices of the misguided and untrained do-gooders of the day. We do not have the luxury of that personal counselling in Canada, except when child migrant agencies like Barnardos or Quarriers send their trained personnel to Home Children Reunions in Canada.

For more on the Irish Famine and Home Children Reunions, read on.

OF THINGS TO COME - A FALL HERITAGE AGENDA

THE HASTINGS COUNTY MUSEUM WILL HOST A REUNION FOR HOME CHILDREN on Saturday Sept 14 at the Belleville Seniors Centre. Details per Rona Rustige at (613) 962-2329.

BILL BURWELL'S FAMOUS STEAM SHOW - and you've also seen this on National TV - will take place at Burwell's Farm west of Burnstown on Saturday and Sunday, 14 and 15 September. Follow the signs for a day of great family fun and entertainment.

HERITAGE RENFREW'S ANNUAL FALL BUS TOUR is slated for Saturday 21 September. We depart from The Old Town Hall at 8:30 a.m. to visit the Railway Museum, Heritage House (featured on the CBC), and other points of interest in the Smiths Falls area. We return by 5:00 p.m. Cost: \$25 per person (includes lunch). Get your ticket now at Aikenhead's Drugstore.

If you can't come to us, we'll go to you! **HERITAGE RENFREW'S ANNUAL REUNION FOR HOME CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS** will be held in Toronto on Saturday, 5 October, 1996 at O.I.S.E. (The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education). Doors open at 12:30 and proceedings begin at 1:00 p.m. We vacate the premises at 4:30. Admission is free. Everybody welcome. We have some excellent speakers:

- Gail Corbett, author of **BARNARDO CHILDREN IN CANADA**,
- Collette Bradford, Head of After Care of Barnardos in England. (Barnardos sent 30,000 of 100,000 children to Canada),
- Richard Wright, a proud (and he has every reason to be) Fegan Old Boy.

OISE (pronounced "oy-see") is at 252 Bloor Street West at St George opposite Varsity Stadium. Under the building there is a Metro stop and car parking. The QUALITY HOTEL (Midtown) at 280 Bloor Street is just a few yards away; for room reservations at the hotel dial 1-800-228-5151 or (416) 968-0010.

HERITAGE RENFREW OPEN MEETING:

At Our Lady of Fatima Church on Wednesday 9 October at 7:30 p.m. to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the Great Famine in Ireland. There is more than one side to the story. Our own author and genealogist CAROL BENNETT McCUAIG will separate fact from fiction and talk of the Famine and settlers to the Renfrew area. Refreshments provided. Admission is free. Everybody welcome. Come and bring a friend, or two, or more. Faith and potatoes!....Bring an army if you like.

IRISH WIT:

And for the Irish and Irish wannabees, Con Hunt is organizing a busload to Ottawa's High School of Commerce to see Hal Roach, the irreverent Irish Comic of "that's-a-good-one-write-it-down" fame. Contact Con at 432-3269 to book a place on this late October junket.

GENEALOGY COURSES IN OTTAWA:

Renfrew's own Norm Crowder will be conducting OB>OGS & BIFHSGO Genealogy Courses this fall in Ottawa. For more information contact Norm at (613) 224-2880 or Jim Heal at (613) 828-9568.

A REUNION FOR QUARRIERS HOME CHILDREN ONLY (and their descendants) will be held at the Waterfront Holiday Inn in Kingston on 26 & 27 October. Details per Dave at (613) 432-2486.

THE POLISH KASHUB FAMILIES IN THE AREAS OF WILNO, OTTER LAKE (PONTIAC COUNTY) and RENFREW WHO SAILED ON THE AGDA IN 1872 is the topic Shirley Mask Connelly will expound on at an UOVGG meeting at the LDS Church in Petawawa on 20 February. Details per Olga Lewis at 432-6958.

"Irish" from page 6

from 8 million to 5 million is a few short years. Some Irish starved to death; others emigrated. And when they did get passage on a ship most had to provide their own food. Many could not provide enough, and so we hear of "soup-eaters" - starving immigrants, generally Irish, who were met at the gangplank when they landed in the Americas by religious zealots of other persuasions who tempted them to "change religions" for a bowl of soup. The oral history of Mount St. Patrick contains more than one reference to "soup eaters". But there are other sides to the story that one seldom hears, and who better to tell them than our own author, publisher and genealogist, Carol Bennett McCuaig. Be sure to join us at our Open Meeting at Our Lady of Fatima Church Hall on Wednesday, 9 October, at 7:30 p.m. Admission is free. Everybody is welcome. Come and bring a friend...bring two...begorra! bring a crowd.

IS THERE A SOLOMON IN THE HOUSE?

"A meeting without lawyers to discuss a property dispute?"

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(Mayor) "Haramis said he has discussed with director of education Peter Hiscott the setting up of an informal meeting with three members of each council, himself and senior staff to discuss the matter... We'll see if the elected officials can come up with a solution or mediation instead of going through the courts."

The Renfrew News, 1 Sep 1996, pp 1 and 9
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We detect an undercurrent of incredulity in the front page question (above) about the most recent development in the Victoria Park affair, and we concur with the perceived sentiment.

However well-intentioned our elected officials might be (and, by the way, the director of Education is NOT an elected official) Heritage Renfrew questions the wisdom of having anyone who is for the large part ignorant of the history of the public park in question decide its fate, especially since the meeting is to be called soonest and town officials will have little or no time to familiarize themselves with the complex history of the site. Since the Board has been the aggressor in claiming Renfrew's Public Park, we can expect that their representatives have discussed the case, have sought their legal counsel's advice and will be more familiar with the case than any non-lawyer the Town delegates. Furthermore, Renfrew Town Council has not discussed the case at length and has handed over all the findings Heritage Renfrew has made in the matter to the Town's legal counsel who is now on the sidelines. It is significant, too, that Heritage Renfrew representatives who have studied the site's history, have not been invited to participate in the proposed discussion. We have asked to be present.

In the meantime, let's look at the decisions the Town-Board braintrust might come to:

- 1) - that the park land indeed belongs to the people of Renfrew,
- 2) - that it belongs to the Board,
- 3) - that a mediator should decide the issue,
- 4) - that the land should be divided between Town and Board.

The Board will not opt for the first option, even though they know they have no legitimate claim to the land. Heritage Renfrew has provided ample evidence that the land belongs to the people of Renfrew, e.g.

- a) The Land Record dating back to the time the park was surveyed and granted to the people of Renfrew in the 1850's,
- b) the historical plaque erected on the site by the provincial government in 1975,
- c) an Ontario Government publication published in 1989 saying the plaque is on the public land Hincks donated,
- d) ample precedents over almost a century and a half showing that - though several tried - no one ever successfully claimed ownership of "Block J".

As for the second option, for the judgment to be in the Board's favour the Board would have to show that it has legal right to the land. This it cannot do for the above reasons and because it simply has no deed. The Land Record shows no change of ownership from the time the land was granted to the people of Renfrew to the present.

Furthermore the page has a diagonal across it after the first entry to signify that there can be no further entries - no further change of ownership. The Board has also claimed the land under terms of the Education Act. When this Act came into effect in the late 1960's it gave the new County Boards all the property and holdings vested in the old local boards. One would assume that such property would have to have been "legally vested" in the local board. There is no record that Block J (Victoria Park) was ever the legal property of the former local Board. Nor did the present County Board think to claim it until they had closed the school adjacent to it. Finally, the Board, having been euhred on its first two arguments, made a claim of adverse possession. Legal counsel advises us that their claim fails to meet the four basic necessary conditions. It would seem that the Board has only offered to seek a resolution without lawyers because they have lost on all legal counts to date. Perhaps they now feel their best recourse is to hoodwink the uninitiated.

Option three, as Mayor Haramis suggests, calls for a mediator to settle the matter. This begs a question or two:

- a) Who is qualified to mediate a matter that has roots in pre-confederation and at what cost?
- b) How could a mediator not come to the conclusion that the people of Renfrew own the property in view of the fact that there is no evidence to prove otherwise, and in view of the fact that other claims to the property over the decades have also failed?
- c) And if he/she did choose any other option but the first one we mentioned, by what authority could his/her will be done?
- d) What legal right does any person have to mediate in this case, given the history of the site and the fact that the Board(s) of Education never have had a deed?
- d) By what authority would the mediator's decision be binding?
- e) And if a third party asked for an injunction on the mediator's decision would that not invalidate or discredit the mediation process?
- f) How can anyone - the Town, the Board, the mediator - decide to bargain away, give away, partition, or sell, what is not theirs in the first place?
- g) Why do some people suspect that there are there other factors or influences at work in suggesting this approach?

Option 4 calls for the land to be divided. Again this raises the question:

- a) By what authority can anyone legitimately give away or sell a portion of land that belongs to the people of Renfrew and for which there is no deed?

The Board might indeed agree to this last option on the grounds that they would rather have something than nothing. In the Mediterranean world one would say that there was an element of *bona figura* to this line of thinking - a sort of 'saving face'. And that again reminds us of King Solomon.

Remember that when a mother's child died, she stole another woman's babe. Both women professed to be the actual mother and the case came before King Solomon. He had to determine who the parent was...the *legitimate owner* of the child. He was stymied briefly by the impassioned pleas of both women, and so he decreed that the child should be split in two so that each should have a half. The real mother would have none of this; only the mother who had an illegitimate claim favoured this option.

At the expense of mixing biblical metaphors, we like to think that the members of the Board of Education are finally starting to recognize the writing on the wall. The onus is on them to prove they have a legitimate claim to the public parkland given by Francis Hincks to the people of Renfrew. We also like to think that our elected Town officials realize there are other considerations (the historical, tourist and recreational value of the park) and a basic principle involved. They must realize too, that there is another basic principle of philosophy - if not law involved: they cannot give what doesn't belong to them. Victoria Parkland, like the commons in the U.K., belongs to the *people of Renfrew*; Town Councillors are mere custodians.

MORE ON THE IRISH

We couldn't resist stealing the cartoon on our cover page. It's a whimsical reminder that even 150 years after the Great Famine there is much we do not know of the effects of the Great Hunger.

The pub was probably in north west England, where, in the late 1840's, before it's sewage systems were fully installed, Liverpool was inundated by a flood of over 300,000 Irish immigrants escaping the Great Famine. In the overcrowded city there was abysmal poverty, no housing, no jobs, and no great social net; there were, on the other hand, developing slums, religious and racial bigotry, starvation and pestilence. And yes, there was a potato famine in England too. And while most Irish emigrated, 80,000 remained in Liverpool where many also died in the streets or in the damp alleyways and cellars in which whole families huddled.

Gin and illegal booze (poteen) were cheap and gin parlours provided the only warm social gathering places. Perhaps some Irish turned to drink to escape even worse memories of English persecution in their homeland, because they would know first hand what Griffith, the census taker of sorts, was finding out in Catholic Donegal. His Valuation records show, for instance, that there were only 10 beds and 93 chairs for 9,000 people. That's 1 chair for every 90 people to sit on and one bed for every 900 people to sleep in. Nor did the English lords - most of them absent - allow their tenants to own land, and they could legally evict them from rented cottages without notice. Nor were the Irish allowed to attain rank in the army, enter the legal profession, sit in parliament, teach or be educated (even in a "ditch school"), or even practice their religion. The livestock and grain grown in Ireland were shipped out of the country even when the potato crop failed. Ireland's population dwindled (see "Irish" page 3)