

Heritage Renfrew

Renfrew Ontario

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NEWSLETTER

January 1985

Dear Member (or Prospective Member) :

This has certainly been the busiest and perhaps the most prospective year that Heritage Renfrew has had since the organization began ! President Dorothy Skinner and her committees on 'Story of Renfrew' and on restoration of Bonnington House have spent very much of their time bringing the Story of Renfrew project to a successful conclusion and in making a significant start on the second one. You'll hear the details if you come out to the

ANNUAL MEETING Library Program Centre ..Thursday, January 24th.. 8 p.m.

Program : Reports; a talk with slides by the Reverend Gordon Peabody; articles for 'Show and Tell'; refreshments.

- .. if you have an article of historic interest, a book, old letter or art object, please bring it along...we'll have a table to display these.
- .. membership fees for 1985 will be accepted by Jessie Stewart and Helen Clark. We appreciate your support whether or not you are able to work actively with Heritage Renfrew. The fee is small... \$3.00..but it's big when put together with everybody else's. And we do need more people who will take an active part : here's your chance to come out, see 'who we are' , and find out whether you might like to work with us.

STAINED GLASS WINDOWS.

You will be hearing something refreshingly different if you come out to listen to the Reverend Gordon Peabody and see his slides on the making of stained glass. A craftsman by nature, this man and his wife Lyn have worked with a large number of materials from wood to wool, and have turned out dozens of art works both for decorating their home and for donating for sale at their church bazaars.

This latest challenge, the making of stained or colored glass, Mr. Peabody took up in 1980 when he enrolled in a course in design and construction under Joseph Nuttgens, ARCA, at the studio near High Wycombe, England. This was a course in the art of painting and firing the glass as well as in designing. Since then, Mr. Peabody has designed and made the "Spring Window" for a small chapel at St. Paul's church in Renfrew as well as a small window in the Rectory.

Speaking of stained glass windows, Mr. Harry Hinchley has discovered this reference in a 1909 Mercury to the two choir windows placed in St. Paul's church that year, eight years after the building of the church proper: "They are of the firm of J.C. Spence and Sons, Montreal. The colours in the window blend in beautifully with the windows in the nave, and in the centre of each is a shield bearing a scroll text : 'Just and True are Thy Ways' on the one, and 'Most Wonderful are Thy Ways' on the other. Canon Quartermaine would be serving his 20th year at the time in what was to be a record 50 years incumbency in Renfrew.

The FUTURE of the OLD TOWN HALL.

H. Hinchley

It seems sad that there is such an outcry to demolish the old Municipal Hall and yet no apparent use for it is in sight. It has stood on Raglan Street a long time and surely could be left a little longer. Only when all hopes of making any use of it are gone should the matter of demolishing it be thought of.

It was put up almost 100 years ago when men prided themselves on the excellence of their workmanship. According to experts from Heritage Canada, the building is structurally sound and could last for another 100 years.

Historically the building has long been a part of Renfrew. To tear it down just to make another parking lot is unthinkable. Once gone, it is gone forever. The Town might well take pride in the old building. For many years it served the Town well and the village before that. In many other towns uses seem to be found for older buildings that have outlived their original purpose. In Perth, for instance, a large old house has been turned over for administration by senior citizens. They make use of it as a place for public meetings and as a lunch room.

Let the old building be preserved, given back its original name of Temperance Hall, and some use will turn up.

CHISHOLM TOWNSHIP..J.R. BOOTH..FATHER GRAVELLE .. and the OWENS FAMILY.

Les Anderson.

The recent passing of Monsignor Stephen Owens, beloved former priest at St. Francis Xavier Church has prompted me to take 'The Chisholm Story' off the shelf and re-read the story of the Owens family (and of my own, the Andersons); and since the names J.R. Booth and Father Joseph Gravelle are also involved in the development of Chisholm, that isolated township that defies explaining exactly where it is, I have three good reasons for passing what I've read along to you.

What was to become Chisholm Township is situated above Mattawa, but 15 miles in off River and highway if you leave at Rutherglen. To-day Chisholm can also be reached from the North Bay to Toronto highway if you turn east, 8 miles from Powassan.

Monsignor Owens' father, and my father and three uncles were pioneer settlers there. How could incoming settlers have reached this land? They had to find good land, or else continue to eke out a poor existence on what they had (the rocky land in Lanark, or the hills of Brudenell or slopes of Mount St. Patrick). Back in 1880 all available good land had been taken up; Canada was even losing some emigrants to United States where the West was more accessible (by covered wagon), whereas here, our West was not to be accessible until completion of the CPR in 1885.

Settlement always followed logging operations, but as we all know, the land that was being opened up above Pembroke was useless for farming. However when J.R. Booth's loggers reached Rutherglen and Lake Nosbonsing, the soil exposed was comparatively free of rocks, and deep. Bonfield on Lake Nosbonsing was the 'end of the steel' at 1880, and settlers might go by scow across the lake six miles further west to the newly surveyed Township of Chisholm, named after the man who headed the survey team.

Patrick Owens and two brothers moved up from a poor clearing at Brudenell to stake out 200 acre lots in 1887. In 1893 Patrick married Miss Susan Bogue who had emigrated from County Tyrone, Ireland along with her family. Here is a quote from the 'Chisholm Story' :

' After clearing sufficient land with a yoke of oxen to eke out an existence, Mr. Owens undertook to purchase and bring in a team of horses. He walked

to Bonfield, then via CPR to Cobden to make his purchase. Being unable to afford the cost of shipping the horses by rail, he drove them all the way back, a distance of 130 miles!

Already in 1883 an Anderson family (my grandparents with four sons and a daughter) had come into the Township from the opposite direction. Having emigrated from Protestant Northern Ireland, the family had been renting a farm at Mono Mills near Toronto but had no money to buy. Hearing about free land grants up north, the two older boys were sent up to check prospects, travelling by train as far as Gravenhurst and walking a trail 80 miles from there to the village of Nipissing, then east 20 miles to Chisholm. The land grants agent in Powassan indicated where they might find unclaimed land, and the boys (in their early 20's) staked out 4 lots and built a shanty. The parents and younger children (one of them my Father) then came by rail over to Carleton Place then west by CPR to North Bay... the line having reached that point by that time. It was still impossible to get into the Township by wagon, so their possessions must have been carried, and it was 20 miles from North Bay south to Chisholm!

Work was hard, but faith in the future was strong; the soil was good; progress was fast. Already by 1893 a school had been built, and a Presbyterian church. By 1912 there were enough settlers to warrant forming a township council; the coming of rural mail delivery, and the telephone ended the isolation. The Owens were raising a family of ten; my Father who had raised Irish eyebrows by marrying a girl from England, had started a family of five. He and Pat Owens served on the Council together, pressing the government for road grants, (and urging local settlers to erect gates at the end of their lanes so that settlers' cattle could be pastured on the roadsides!)

Meanwhile the eastern side of the Township was filling with settlers. Booth had exhausted his timber limits and his loggers and rivermen, most of them originating from Quebec, were taking up lots and settling down as farmers. For some reason this part of the Township took the name Chiswick... rather misleading since it was populated entirely by French-Canadians. According to Father Gravelle's account of early days in Chisholm, "the first chapel was built in 1895, and a missionary priest served from Bonfield. Cash being a rarity, the parish was subsidized by the Bishop of Pembroke". As more and more French settlers came in, a church, 'St. Louis de France' was built.

It was to this church that the Owens and a few other Irish Catholic families travelled from the west side of the township. Father Gravelle was the first resident priest as of 1920. This devout priest was to remain in Chiswick for 31 years, contending with epidemics and sickness, giving spiritual encouragement as well as educational and legal advice. The church like our own was a poor structure; I remember as a boy seeing the church bell, mounted on an easel on the ground; money for a steeple would come later.

It was through the influence of Irish family tradition and also of Father Gravelle that Stephen Owens was called to the priesthood. Like me he had to leave home to attend High School (in Douglas), so far away. Years later I asked Monsignor, on the street in Renfrew, "How come you didn't go to Powassan Continuation School like the rest of us in Chisholm? With a wry twinkle in his eye he replied, "Well, my Mother and Father Gravelle likely figured Powassan was too sinful, and sent me to the Sisters in Douglas instead!" The same man rose as high in the hierarchy of his Church as he probably wanted to, and crowned his career with the building of the beautiful new St. Francis Xavier Church.

He had grown up in a family where hospitality was a main feature. On many a cold stormy day Mrs. Owens would call out to her children coming in from school, "Bring Audrey and Ernie in to stay for the night". These children, the Graff's had to walk 3 miles to that school (Audrey became a teacher, came to Admaston, and married George Reid in 1930).

I remember the definition Monsignor Owens gave for Christian Love when he spoke from the pulpit of Trinity-St. Andrews in Renfrew during 'ecumenical year': "Love is really loving concern for others", he said.

Now his story, together with those of Father Gravelle and J.R. Booth are part of the Ottawa Valley heritage.