Our Heritage

OUR HOME

JUNE 2025

VOLUME 8

Little Canada's Krista Kalbfleisch

Sculptor Ruth Abernethy

Homer Watson's Kilbride Connection

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The "Leap of Faith" in Wilmot's "Oasis in the Centre", which sculptor Ruth Abernethy says may be her favourite piece. *(Paul Knowles photo)*

Our Heritage Our Home

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HOMER WATSON'S
CASTLE KILBRIDE CONNECTIONS

By Nancy Silcox

Wilmot Township was fairly a-buzz with excitement mounting towards the eagerly-anticipated date of June 18th, 1988. Advertised as "The Important Collections and Furnishings of 'Castle Kilbride' continuously occupied by the Livingston family since its erection in 1873 by James Livingston, 'the Flax & Oil King of Canada,'" an auction, unlike any the rural community of Baden, Ontario had witnessed, was about to unfold.

Up for sale, over a period of four days, would be the collected treasures of three generations of the Livingston family – from furnishings to art, to vintage clothing and furs, children's toys, books, China, tools and assorted memorabilia. A drawing card for collectors of art would be four paintings by the renowned Doon artist, and Livingston friend, Homer Watson.

Given that, in Watson's heyday, two of his works had been purchased by Queen Victoria to be hung in the Royal Gallery at Windsor Castle, art admirers and collectors were expected to come early, with pocketbooks at the ready.

This writer took her place among the curious, the collectors and the gadflies. But for me, viewing the famed works of "The Man from Doon" was sufficient. Purchase was only a fond dream.

*****

Homer Watson's early career had been a storied one. Strongly influenced by the British Romantic School, he had gained inspiration from the pastoral landscapes in and around Doon, south of the bustling settlement of Berlin, (later Kitchener) – the woodlands, rushing streams, watermills, and grazing cattle.

After being invited to become a member of the select Ontario Society of Artists (OSA) in 1878, he was invited to show his work at the prestigious OSA exhibition in Ottawa. There, one of his paintings, "The Old Mill" was purchased by Governor-General Lorne and his wife Princess Louise, the daughter of Queen Victoria. The price of the work was $300. The sale was the turning point in Watson's life.

After a second Watson painting, "The Last Day of the Drought," was also acquired by Queen Victoria in 1880, the Doon artist's fame soared. In 1882, poet and playwright Oscar Wilde, on a visit to Canada, became entranced by Watson's work. He pronounced the Doon painter "the Canadian Constable," a reference to the British landscape painter John Constable. Wilde then commissioned a painting for his own collection.

Watson was prolific in the latter years of the 19th century, exhibiting an estimated 174 paintings between 1890 and 1900, with major shows being held in London and New York. Canadian galleries lagged far behind in both recognizing Homer's fame and in purchasing his work for public exhibition. Not until 1925 was one of Homer Watson's worked acquired by Canada's National Gallery.

Private Canadian citizens, including James Livingston, owner of the J & J Livingston Linseed Oil Company of Baden,

Homer Watson "cabinet card", photographed by J. Esson c. 1884. *(Homer Watson House and Gallery permanent collection)*

Ontario saw much more to the "home-grown" Doon artist. He had purchased a number of Watson's landscapes for his estate Castle Kilbride, Baden.

Records kept at the Castle Kilbride National Historic Site document four acquisitions of Watson's work between 1880 and 1920. They included one of the artist's most celebrated works, "Old Mill and Stream," (a companion piece to Queen Victoria's "The Old Mill") in 1879; "The Sunset," in 1907; "Rushing Stream by Moonlight", 1910; and "Sugar Cabin," in 1913.

Watson biographer, Dr. Gerald Noonan indicates in his book, "Refining the Real Canada: Homer Watson's Spiritual Landscape", that the painter had set up a studio in the belvedere of Castle Kilbride, and it was from this aerie that he had painted "Sugar Cabin" (alternately titled "Sugar Cabin at Kilbride.")

With the death of James Livingston in 1920, the J.& J. Livingston Linseed Oil Company, as well as the ownership of the family home, Castle Kilbride, passed into the hands of James' eldest son, John Peter (J.P.). Following in the artistic tastes of his father, J.P. continued to patronize Homer Watson. In 1922 he purchased "Bow River", and "Bow River, Banff," adding them to the Kilbride collection.

Yet, by the early 1920's, Homer Watson's fortunes had begun to change. With the noisy emergence on the Canadian art scene of the upstart Group of Seven, the universe had altered for those who had gone before. Homer Watson, as well as others of the Romantic School were now left behind, in the Group's frenzied rush to paint the "real and raw" Canada.

Sensing the seismic shift, Homer Watson struggled to adapt. His style became more Impressionistic, replacing the pastoral greens, browns and greys of his earlier works with vivid pinks and mauves. Colours were applied heavily to the canvas in impasto technique. Watson's adaptations were ill-received and sales of his work plummeted. Still, to Watson's salvation, the Livingston patronage endured. Records kept at Castle Kilbride National Historic Site note three Watson purchases in 1926 and 1927: "Winter in the Woods;" "Sunset by the Stream;" and "Rocky Mountain Subject."

Old Mill and Stream, the only original Watson still hanging in Castle Kilbride. *(Copyright Castle Kilbride)*

As the decade closed, more financial pain was on the horizon. Both Watson and his sister Phoebe, who now kept house for him after the death of his wife Roxa, had heavily invested in the stock market. With its crash in 1929, the pair was left virtually penniless.

In desperation, Watson threw himself on the mercy of Eric Brown, Head of the National Gallery in Ottawa. Brown's response was a curt "No." Watson biographer Gerald Noonan reports:

"Brown was quick to blame Watson for not making more careful provision for his old age…. that every artist knows or should know that as he grows older fashions change and popularity wanes. Therefore artists must make careful provision for the period if they are wise…."

Watson next appealed to his old friend, William Lyon Mackenzie King, Prime Minister of Canada. King's response was sympathetic to his rebuff by Canada's National Gallery. "I'm even more disgusted, as well as disappointed with the action of the Gallery, than you yourself," he is reported to have told Watson. "Disgusted," King might be, but not to the extent of helping his old friend out financially. It seems the wealthy King purchased one of Homer's paintings but needed to be chased to pay up.

Watson's biographer states that by 1931 the Watsons were "literally starving to death," and the artist's "financial affairs were … in dreadful shape." Watson now turned to patron J.P. Livingston for assistance.

Poignant letters to Livingston from both Phoebe and Homer Watson are testament to the desperate straits which "the Canadian Constable" found himself, during The Great Depression. One, written by Phoebe Watson, in October 1933, implores Liv-

Watson's untitled painting known as "Rowboat on River", cc. 1870. *(Homer Watson House and Gallery permanent collection)*

ingston to take possession of a painting "Moonlight" which the Baden collector had previously admired.*

Later, Phoebe wrote again: "It is rather hard on Homer to write particularly about business. …Now as we have some work starting outside which needs finish (sic) before the winter comes on, and we will have to borrow the money to pay for it, if you cannot possibly see your way to taking the picture and cannot pay more than $400 at the present time, it will help considerably."

Again, Phoebe Watson continues her financial plea to the lord of Castle Kilbride: "Our taxes for last year and this will have to be paid soon too and Homer's paint bill is again mounting up… so we are turning to you in our extremity and if you will be so very kind as to let us know what you can do we will appreciate it very much."

A heart-rending letter from Homer to J.P. follows. One can only imagine the shame the artist felt to put pen to paper in this way. "I am in rather tight straits for want of money. The reason is the winter has been altogether a knock-out for no one could come as expected to buy….This has been a deuce of a time."

In 1930, Homer Watson, embittered, almost totally deaf, and now suffering from a heart condition, transferred the title of his current and future paintings to the Waterloo Trust and Savings Company as collateral for a monthly allowance. Records indicate that 460 Watson paintings changed hands at this time. It was a heart-rending end of the career of an artist heralded as "the Man of Doon."

On May 30, 1936, Homer Watson, aged 81, passed away at his home in Doon. Tributes flowed, including from Prime Minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King. King wrote effusively: "He was one of the noblest souls I have ever known. A man I really and truly loved, a great gentleman & a great artist."

Homer Watson with one of his paintings, 1931. *(Homer Watson House and Gallery permanent collection)*

What tributes came from J.P. Livingston at Baden's Castle Kilbride remain undiscovered.

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It is estimated that a crowd numbering in the thousands attended the Castle Kilbride Auction over its four days of viewing and acquiring. Included in the treasures sold were four works by Homer Watson, "Sugar Cabin at Castle Kilbride Farm," 1913 ($6ooo); "Old Watermill in River Landscape," 1879 ($17,000); the smaller "Rocky Mountain Valley With River($5000); and "The Old Grist Mill," 1879, $10,000.

For this awe-struck auction-goer, the acquisition of a Homer Watson work lay years in the future. But determined not to depart without any Livingston treasure, I bid for and won a cornhusk doll from the family "Canadian Collection." I treasure it to this day.

Records held the Castle Kilbride National Historic Site indicate that in 2025 three works by Homer Watson are retained. From the original holdings, only "Old Mill and Stream," remain. "Castle on the Grand," of 1928, and "Near Doon," 1930 were both donated by private collectors.

*No record of "Moonlight," by Homer Watson being purchased is recorded.

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Watson's "Collecting the Hay".

Watson's "Cattle Crossing the River", donated to Castle Kilbride by the Hope Estate. *(Copyright Castle Kilbride)*

ART THAT CAPTURES HISTORY *and creates a connection*

By Paul Knowles

As I sat in one of the matching Queen Anne armchairs in our living room, I was very conscious of the dual nature of the conversation I was having. On one hand, the woman in the other chair was a Wilmot neighbour, as much attuned to local issues, personalities and stories as I tend to be. On the other hand, this was one of Canada's leading figures in the art world, a creator with an unparalleled understanding of both the craft and the philosophy necessary to her work.

I was talking with Ruth Abernethy, the sculptor who has created many of the best-known pieces of public art in this country. These impressive works include the recently installed, 150% life-sized sculpture of Queen Elizabeth II seated on the Throne of Canada, unveiled at Queen's Park in 2023. Ruth has also created iconic, life-sized sculptures of musicians Glenn Gould and Oscar Peterson and famous Canadians including author Margaret Atwood, actor Al Waxman, and Olympian Ian Miller (depicted majestically astride his famous show-jumper Big Ben).

Ruth Abernethy with her sculpture of golfer Ada MacKenzie, and project sponsor Yvonne Bland. *(Photo courtesy Ruth Abernethy)*

And of course, there are the very fine sculptures of Canadian politicians, like John A. MacDonald and Lester B. Pearson, which recent controversies have seen relegated into some unidentified storage unit. We get to that later in the conversation.

The list of famous persons – and lesser-known folk – she has captured in bronze is very long, indeed. Her work can be seen locally in the garden at Wilmot Centre ("Leap of Faith"), and on the patio in front of the Stratford Festival Theatre ("Raising the Tent"). You can also check out her website, and scroll through the galleries. You'll be there a while.

Three things are universally true of Ruth's commemorative portraits in bronze. First, they are superbly crafted. Second, there is a atmosphere of history imbued into every piece. And third, the viewer finds a sense of connection with the subject – the actual person may well be dead and gone, but we still feel that in some way, we have met them.

This result is deeply rooted in Ruth's philosophic approach to her art. She looks back to her career creating props and designs for theatre. "I've got 20 years in theatre, 15 at the [Stratford] Festival. It was always about history. You can know more about 'now' if you have an awareness of 'prior'."

One direct result of that awareness, she says, is that when she is creating a likeness of a historic person, she brings an feeling for that person's societal environment. She calls this, "cages", and refers to the television and movie series, "Downtown Abbey", in which every character is confined to their specific position in life. It's important, she feels, that when we try to get to know a historic person, we should also inform ourselves about their "cage" – what defined them and restricted them in their role in their time.

She explains that "dimensional portraiture never goes out of style," because it is a style of art that invites viewers to meet and interact with the person portrayed. And that is why excellence in this style of sculpture is important, because viewers are used to making personal connections, based in reading the features of others.

That concept comes to artistic life in all of Ruth's works. Consider the welcoming smile on the face of Oscar Peterson, as he sits leaning on his piano, with half of the piano bench available, an invitation for the viewer to join him. It's a bit more intimidating to share the bench occupied by Glenn Gould, in front of CBC's Glenn Gould Studio on Front Street in Toronto, because Gould is clearly in a contemplative mood, not eager for conversation.

Ruth actually laughs about the placement of classical pianist Gould. "It's curious to see that a man this reclusive is in such a public space. He was eccentric. He might be horrified. Also – he's across from the Dome; thousands of baseball fans have been introduced to Glenn Gould!"

Her recent creation of the Queen Elizabeth II sculpture reveals a lot about the life and work of Ruth Abernethy. First, nothing happens quickly. This was actually a 10-

year project, begun well before the monarch passed away. Second, in our current environment, it was inevitably controversial since, as Ruth states, "Everyone has been asked to reconsider public portraits." Overall, says Ruth, "It was a really difficult project."

In the end, it is a magnificent work; a maquette (small-scale model) of the sculpture has been presented to King Charles.

Ruth's comments about reconsidering public portraits brings us back to the question of the works that have been removed from public display. Both of her John A. MacDonald sculptures – one at Baden's Prime Ministers Path and the other in Picton – have been hidden away in storage, and her life-sized sculpture of Nobel Prize-winning Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson is stored along with John A.

I expected her to be upset, but while she is not a big fan of the decisions, she compared the events to selling a car – once you have taken the money for the car, you no longer are involved in what happens to it. She was paid for her work, she says, and the buyers are now responsible. She admits that she was tempted to get involved in the most recent consultations about the fate of the Wilmot sculptures, but held back, because she could be seen to have a bias, as someone who was paid to produce the works.

It does seem ironic that the decisions about the John A. statue have evoked so much debate and controversy, when the title Ruth bestowed on the sculpture – which features a standing John A. and two empty chairs – is "A Canadian Conversation."

As our own conversation continues, though, Ruth adds, "It's not really my concern… but I'm not saying I don't care. Someone asked me if I want them [the sculptures] back, but they are made for the public."

And reflecting on the current political climate, she did note that American expansionism was an issue at the time of John A. MacDonald, as well, and that it was MacDonald who was able to "strategize" to end that threat. "There has to be some credit given for that," she says.

Turning to a more pragmatic question, I asked Ruth how she approaches creating life-sized, three-dimensional sculptures of people she has never met, where there is unlikely to be anything but perhaps still, black and white, one-dimensional photos of the subjects.

"In the end," she explained, "You act it out." She identifies the moment – the posture and pose appropriate to the situation – and she gathers as much information about the person as she can. Then, "I literally act it out." Assuming the character she is portraying, she determines, "If this is how I am feeling, this is how I portray myself." A great example is a sculpture of two men deeply involved in theatre in Canada – director John Hirsch and Manitoba Theatre Centre co-founder. Ruth says that Hirsch – who she knew at Stratford, an unusual connection that is not typical of her projects – was "always in motion." Hendry, she says, was intensely thoughtful. Their personalities burst forth from the sculpture, Hirsch's arms raised, Hendry's hand on his chin. You already feel you know a great deal about these men.

That underpinning determination – to truly depict her subjects as they were, in their era – suggests the reasons Abernethy has quite willingly sculpted historical persons who have become controversial. She says, "For me to accurately depict them in their time, any contrivance on my part is a red herring. What I'm trying to do has to be

Glenn Gould, contemplating in front of the CBC studio that bears his name. *(Paul Knowles photo)*

The bust of Lester B. Pearson, created from a mold of the sculpture once in the Prime Ministers' Path. *(Photo courtesy Ruth Abernethy)*

Ruth's iconic sculpture of Oscar Peterson.

true to that character in that time period."

Her work can be found in sundry locations in Canada and around the world. Some are on constant public display, like Gould in Toronto. Some have a been commissioned by institutions and organizations, such as Ada Mackenzie, a professional golfer and founder of the Ladies' Golf Club of Toronto, a unique organization begun in 1924, that still exists, today as reportedly the only women's course in North American. Ruth has a lot of affection for the late Ms. MacKenzie: "She was a spark in the dark, that woman!"

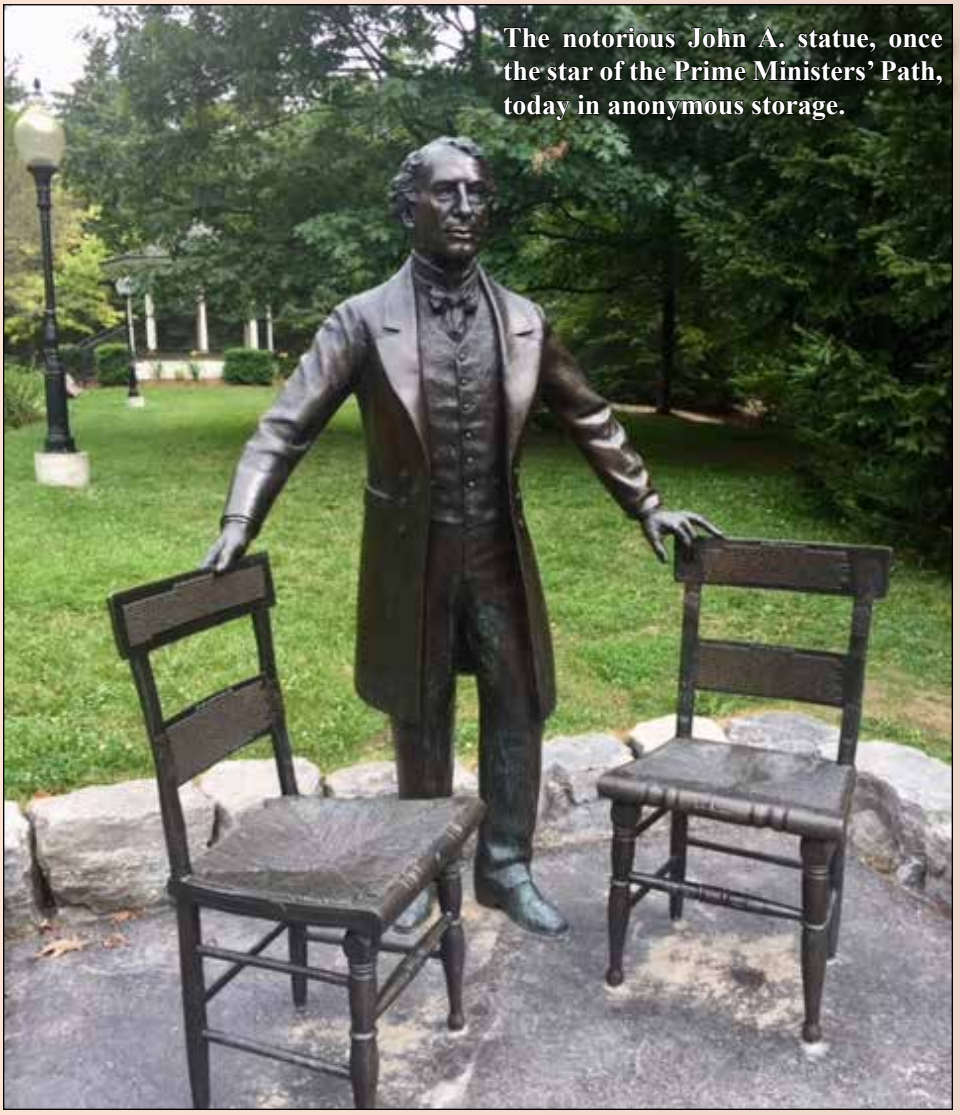
Ruth's bust of Margaret Atwood is on display at the headquarters of the Royal Canadian Geographic Society. Ruth was asked to produce two busts for that recent installation at the Society; the other was of Lester B. Pearson. When Ruth produces a life-sized portrait, it is not practical to keep a mold of the entire piece, but she does keep a mold of the head and shoulders. Which means that the bust of Pearson proudly displayed by the RCGS had its origins in the now-stored-away sculpture of Pearson from the Prime Ministers' Path.

Given the enormous volume of Ruth's work – and we haven't even discussed her significant output of more abstract, smaller sculptures – I asked a very unfair question: "What is your favourite of all your works?"

She initially replied, "Your work is like your children." But then, surprisingly, she acknowledged, "I do like the Wilmot kids" – the sculpture entitled "Leap of Faith" in the municipal garden at the Wilmot Centre crossroads. She praises the setting – the landscaping and the gardens – and says, "As public art, they really are successful."

Ruth told me, "I'm close to being retired,", but she still seems willing to take on new projects. Part of this must be love of the work, but she also exudes a sense of self-confidence. She can stand back, look at her own work, and know that it is excellent. And that helps to inspire her to continue to produce dimensional portraits that capture and communicate history and personality to all who encounter them.

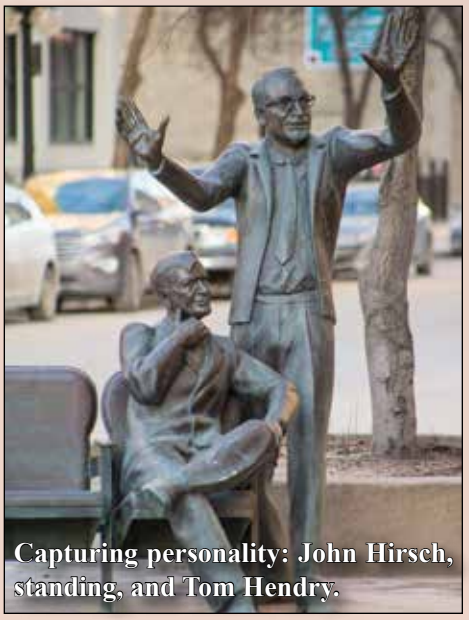
To learn more about Ruth Abernethy, visit www.ruthabernethy.com, or read her newly published book, "In Form: Life and Legacies in Bronze".



The notorious John A. statue, once the star of the Prime Ministers' Path, today in anonymous storage.

A youthful William Lyon MacKenzie King, Waterloo Region-born and Canada's longest-serving Prime Minister.

"Raising the Tent" at the Stratford Festival.



Capturing personality: John Hirsch, standing, and Tom Hendry.

CELEBRATING OUR HERITAGE, IN MINIATURE

Krista Kalbfleisch loves "being a small part in the happiest moments of people's lives"

By Paul Knowles

Our heritage is preserved in many forms: in writing, in photographs, in art, in oral traditions, in song, and in architecture, among others. Tavistock native Krista Kalbfleisch is part of a unique approach to preserving and celebrating Canada's architectural heritage; she's Direct of Partner Experience at Little Canada, a unique and quite frankly astonishing attraction in the heart of downtown Toronto.

Little Canada occupies 45,000 square feet of a building at 10 Dundas Street East. No written description can truly capture the wonder of the place – but in brief, it's a collection of miniaturized versions of iconic Canadian regions – Little Niagara, Little Toronto, Little Golden Horseshow, Little Ottawa, Petit Québec, Little East Coast, and Little West Coast. Each region features miniaturized (on a 1:87 "HO" scale) buildings, geographic features, cars, trains, airplanes, waterfronts, animals and people…. About 40,000 people, all about three quarters of an inch tall, and 7,000 "littlized" versions of actual visitors to Little Canada. Including this writer – you can find my "Little Me" standing outside the Yellowbelly Brewery in St. John's, Newfoundland.

The entire project is the vision of a Dutch immigrant to Canada, Jean-Louis Brenninkmeijer. He told me the inspiration for the place was a desire "to introduce people to Canada," a process he and his family had gone through when they came to Canada for a two-year stay in 1999. When they came, he says, "We knew nothing about Canada." They set out to learn – and they have never left. Now, his vision has introduced hundreds of thousands of visitors to the story of this country, a story told

Krista Kalbfleisch stands beside the Waterloo/Stratford region of Little Canada. *(Photo by Paul Knowles)*

through dramatic miniaturization.

And the unique story behind Little Canada – including a very patient ten years from inception to opening – is fascinating. But here, let's focus on what brought a girl from Tavistock to helping to lead the team at this unique Canadian attraction. Krista told me, "I grew up in Tavistock, the youngest of three kids, with two older brothers. My parents, Gary and Lois Kalbfleisch, made our home there. My mom still lives in Tavistock, though my dad passed away many years ago. My oldest brother also passed away recently, in September, but he had lived nearby in New Hamburg for many years and my other brother lived in Tavistock until a few years ago when he moved north."

Krista attended elementary and secondary school in the immediate area. "I attended Sprucedale Public School in Shakespeare and was actively involved in sports."

Much of her early life may seem typical of our area, although most of us probably didn't learn to play an unusual, unspellable musical instrument. Krista explains, "Like most country kids, we spent most of our time outside – riding bikes, exploring, or heading to the arena to watch hockey. I took figure skating lessons for many years and also learned to play the organ, a decision influenced by my grandmother, even though I really wanted to learn the piano like my friends. I was also part of a local marching band, playing the glockenspiel alongside my neighbour."

She adds, "Family was a big part of my

Little Canada founder and "chief visionary officer" Jean-Louis B renninkmeijer *(Photo by Paul Knowles)*

upbringing – my grandparents on my dad's side lived next door, which added another wonderful layer of connection. In high school and college, I worked at a local nursing home and loved spending time with the residents, listening to their stories."

Like the majority of teenagers from this area, high school meant Waterloo-Oxford, in Baden. Krista recalls, "I loved high school, and having two 'cool' older brothers definitely helped make the experience easier. One of my favourite subjects was art, and I was lucky enough to take one of the first photography courses offered. It was so great to capture a moment on film – yes film! – and then to go into the dark room and develop your own photo."

"I also took the first Introduction to Marketing course that was available, which later became Entrepreneurial Studies, though I'm not sure what it's called now. This was my first real business course, and I took to it immediately. Up until that point, I had thought I wanted to be a fashion designer, despite having no real talent for it, but that marketing course changed everything. It was taught by Mr. Andy Flanagan, to whom I will always be grateful. He was a fantastic teacher."

Parliament Hill, in full celebration mode. *(Photo by Paul Knowles)*

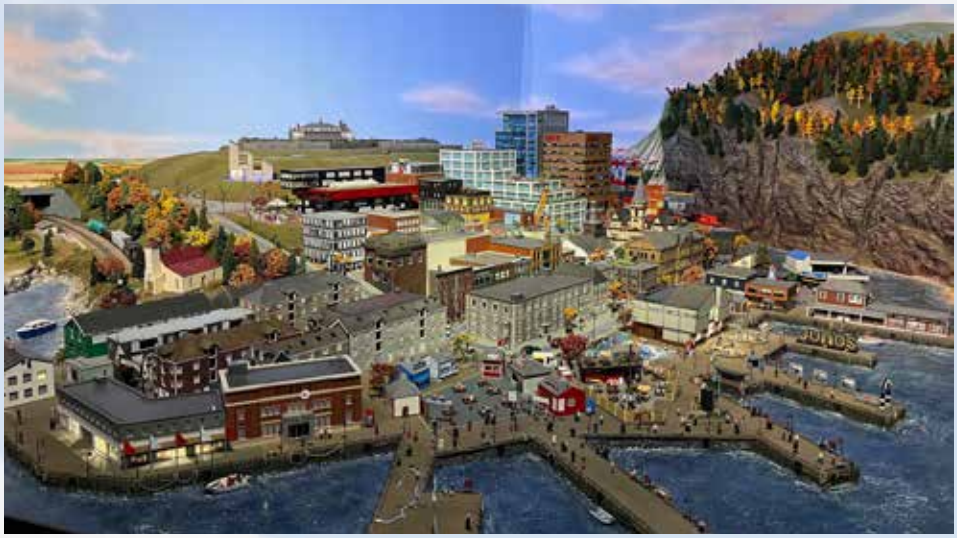
Krista's education path continued down that road. "After discovering my passion for marketing in high school, I knew I wanted to pursue a program that provided hands-on experience. I chose Mohawk College and earned my diploma in the three-year Advertising program. During my time there, I had two exceptional teachers, Cathy Garrick and Peter Dyer, who truly cemented my love of marketing."

Krista's focus on marketing morphed slightly into a more specific affection for tourism promotion. She told me, "My career path wasn't initially focused on tourism, but that changed in 1999 when I started working at the CN Tower. Over the next 24 years, I held various marketing positions and fell in love with the tourism industry. I love knowing that I am a small part of some of the happiest moments in people's lives. It's

a special thing, creating lasting memories for those visiting with friends and family and working at such an iconic Canadian attraction was something I took great pride in.

Beyond my work at the CN Tower, I also became a board member for Attractions Ontario as well as the Ontario Chapter of the Travel Media Association of Canada."

Her work at Little Canada wasn't a casual job change – Krista fell in love with the place from the moment she visited. She says, "It wasn't until Little Canada opened [in August, 2021], and I visited for the first time that I felt inspired to take on a new challenge. I was immediately hooked and thrilled to join the team as Leader, Marketing and Tourism in January 2023. I quickly moved up to Senior Leader and, as of April 2024, became the Director of Partner Experience. Now, I have the incredible job of working closely with iconic Canadian organizations and integrating them into our little world in a big way. I'm also fully aware of the irony of my transition – from working at the one-time record holder for the world's tallest building, to celebrating Canada in miniature!"



Halifax, Nova Scotia *(Photo by Paul Knowles)*

There's an intriguing fact related to Little Canada's version of the CN Tower – it's so tall, in reality, that it's the only thing in all 45,000 square feet not miniaturized at 1:87. The Tower is scaled down, at 1:160. But it still towers over the Rogers Centre, with its movable roof, packed stands, and a Jumbotron that shows Jose Bautista's iconic bat flip.

"Little Canada" actually covers 45,000 square feet, and is only seven-twelfth's finished! *(Photo by Paul Knowles)*

Krista says that Little Canada has found a unique way to tell the story of Canada's heritage. "Each destination tells a story, and watching how visitors react to seeing Canada in this way is incredibly rewarding."

She adds, "There are so many things that make Little Canada special – the story of why it was created, the incredible people who work here, and the artistry and attention to detail in every build." That is evident in details from the Terry Fox statue in St. John's to wildly unusual guest rooms in the Chateau Laurier, to the after-dark (yes, there are days and nights at Little Canada, although they happen on a 15-minute cycle) light show on Parliament Hill.

Krista told me, "One of my favourite aspects is how our guests can become a part of our world. My 'Little Me' can be found in the Oktoberfest parade, a nod to my German heritage and the many times I attended the parade in my youth. My family has their own ideas for their future placements – my husband grew up in Hamilton, and my son was born in Toronto, so those destinations may become where their 'Little Me's' find their home."

Both Krista and Jean-Louis have a clear and optimistic understanding of the role Little Canada can play in teaching Cana-

dians – both long-time residents and newcomers – about this country. Jean-Louis told me that Little Canada provides "a chance for every Canadian to see the country from coast to coast to coast." With that in mind, the enthusiastic folk behind Little Canada are not resting on their laurels.

Jean-Louis says, "We're only 7/12 done." The Canada's North region opens this year, after in-depth consultation with Canada's Indigenous peoples. Then will come the Little Prairies, Petit Montréal, and – here's an oxymoron – the "Little Rockies". Then, says the "chief visionary officer", "I'd like to do an airport, at the end." Each region takes about 18 months to produce. To date, over 400,000 hours of work have gone into the creation of Little Canada.

Not surprisingly, Krista agrees with her boss: "We know that for a lot of people, this might be the closest they get to experiencing Canada in its entirety."

And she adds, "We make sure to highlight the interesting, often hidden gems that make each region and community unique, because we want visitors to feel a personal connection to the people and places that make Canada what it is. We also believe that showcasing Canada in this immersive, conversation-starting format creates an opportunity for true learning and relationship building. It's more than just a fun experience, although it is that too. It allows people to deepen their understanding of what defines Canada, appreciate its rich diversity, and see how every corner of the country contributes to the larger story."

With the smile that so often is found in Krista's face, she reflects on the current state of the world, and Little Canada's place in it. "What is great about Little Canada is that our space can be a respite from the political turmoil and division that is so prevalent these days, outside of and even within our country. It's really meaningful to us that we are an evergreen, welcoming touchpoint to connect with and celebrate the best that Canada has to offer. What has been interesting and uplifting about this moment is that even with all of the 'elbows up' talk, our little world remains 'arms open' where everyone can see themselves, and find their place in Little Canada."

Victoria, British Columbia. *(Photos by Paul Knowles)*

St. John's, Newfoundland, including the author's favourite, the Yellowbelly Brewery.

Gros Morne, Newfoundland.

Québec City in the winter.

Ottawa's famous Byward Market.

The Rogers Centre, at night with the roof open and Jose Bautista on the Jumbotron.

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TIM LOUIS

Member of Parliament, Kitchener-Conestoga

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XAVIER BOEHLER AND THE NEW HAMBURG POTTERY WORKS

Boehler Potter on Peel Street in New Hamburg, in the mid-nineteenth century.

By Kristen Hahn

Straddling the worlds of art and manufacturing was the village potter. By the late 19th Century there were twelve potteries throughout Waterloo County, wherever was found a reliable source of clay, sand, and metals for making glazes. Theirs was a necessary industry for a burgeoning village and they were relied upon to craft the essential implements for daily life; not just pots and plates, but also stove tubes and crocks for preserving food. And they made these things beautiful, with vibrant glazes, or painted flourishes in a style unique to them, or adorned with sprig moulds of leaves, shells, or flowers. They prove that while form follows function, beauty can still elevate the form.

The making of early pottery was an arduous affair. In the spring, cold clay was cut from the banks of the Nith, liquified and screened to remove stones, twigs, and other such materials, and piled up to dry. It was then hauled back to the pottery for further refinement before it was thrown, formed, dried, fired, decorated, and sold. At many points throughout the production of earthenware, product could be lost; the quality of the clay may be compromised, cracks may form in the goods as they dried, and an explosion in the kiln could destroy the effort of days. It took a tremendous amount of strength and patience to do this work, and a deftness and skill not easily mastered.

Chief among Wilmot's great potters was Francis "Xavier" Boehler. He was born in Alsace, France in 1821 and immigrated to Canada in the 1840s. In 1847, he married Ontario-born Maryann Yantz in Preston and their first of 13 children was born in 1848. His brother Valentine accompanied him on his migration and together they established a pottery business in New Hamburg. By 1852, Valentine had moved to Egmondville, Ontario and started Huron Pottery which has since been extensively studied and excavated by the Royal Ontario Museum.

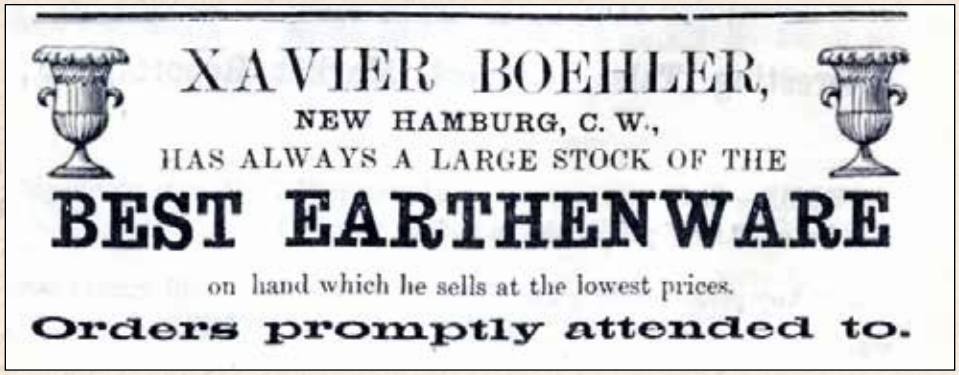
The 1854 map of New Hamburg places his pottery works at 189-195 Peel Street and Boehler officially acquired the deed to the land from town-founder William Scott in 1856. By 1861, he seasonally employed three men at $15 each per month and one woman at $6 per month. By 1871, he was processing fifty loads of clay into earthenware worth $1,000 with a profit of $500. It was always a business of slim margins and he struggled financially. The Mercantile Agency Reference Books assigned him a fair rating in 1868 and he was unrated by 1877. Xavier was bolstered at times by loans from his brother and, in 1879, from Frederick Merner, famed carriage maker, property developer, and mayor of New Hamburg.

Financial ruin notwithstanding, like so many enterprises at that time, there were

dangers in this line of work. Lead was the most common metal used for glaze as it yielded rich brown and orange colours; highly-toxic antimony produced yellow; and a technique by which a pot was coated with iron glazing and packed in rock salt sometimes formed poisonous chlorine gas. Physical dangers extended beyond the obvious burns and cuts. In 1897, the regional paper reported that, "The twelve-year-old son of Conrad Schneider, while assisting in the grinding of clay, got caught in the horsepower and wasn't rescued before one foot was badly smashed and the leg broken in two places."

In 1881, Xavier handed the operation of his business to his son Joseph, and purchased a tract of clay-rich land on Arnold Street to set up another son, Henry, with a subsidiary pottery works. However, earthenware pottery was on the decline as customer preferences shifted to more durable stoneware and imported glass. The clay deposits were sold to Nicholas Berlet in 1893 and became Berlet's Brick and Tile Yard, followed by Fred Schafer's prolific and profitable brickworks.

Xavier died in 1883 at age 62 from a stomach disorder, and five years later, the property went up for auction where it was purchased by Sebastian Weiss and rented back



An 1867 advertisement for Boehler Pottery, from H. Irwin and George E. Burnham, 1867 Gazetteer and Directory of the County of Waterloo *(Kitchener Public Library, Grace Schmidt Room).*

to Xavier's son Joseph Boehler. The 1885 Fire Underwriter's Map shows the property consisting of a one-and-a-half-storey brick building with two single-storey frame additions, and three large work sheds along the northernmost side of the property.

Clay continued to be thrown on Peel Street until 1914. Edna Bergey grew up in a house beside the pottery business, then operated solely by William Cadwell. It closed up during the winter months and subsisted primarily on sales from existing stock, but an occasional large order would fire up the kiln once more. The young girl enjoyed visiting this shop, so unlike any other place she had seen. She recalled the one-storey structure with shelves along the east wall for drying unfired wares, and the potters' wheels by the south wall near an entrance to an attached dwelling. A horse turned the vertical shaft of the pug-mill to clean and blend the raw clay, and an eight-foot-long kiln, which gave off a tremendous amount of heat, was sealed with a deafening clang by a huge cast-iron door.

The building was sold in 1902 to Jacob Becker. He was the founder of Becker's Department Store, known more recently as Murray's Clothing at 95-105 Peel Street. Jacob's son, Herman Becker, inherited

the pottery and, following Herman's sudden death, it passed to the hands of Carrie Becker. She was an extraordinary businesswoman who not only carried on the property management of her late husband's portfolio, but expanded her interests into property development. On May 15, 1914, The Independent announced: "The old pottery building on Peel Street, which is one of the oldest buildings in town, is to be torn down this summer. Mrs. Carrie Becker, owner of the property intends to have two new residences erected thereon, which will add greatly to the appearance of this street."

Several modifications have taken place over the years. The two buildings were joined across the second storey, and the resulting triplex was further divided into apartments. Friedrich and Freida (Kusch) Mueller, who purchased the buildings in 1973, undertook an extensive alteration of Carrie's property in 1975. They built a huge addition behind the largest of the two houses where the pug-mill once turned, and laid a parking lot behind the buildings.

The archaeology department at Wilfrid Laurier University launched an emergency "rescue dig" to collect a representative sample of pottery artifacts from areas they identified as likely sites for "waster" material, and where they hoped to find architectural features. Over two days in October they collected 1,289 sherds and sixty-nine objects; nothing complete, but enough to identify bowls, flowerpots, plates and saucers, milk pans, a cream pot, stove tubes, jugs with single-loop handles, bottles, and preserve jars.

With what little was recovered of Xavier Boehler's enterprise, one may be tempted to surmise that his work bore a lot in common with his brother's in Egmondville. However, there were significant and surprising differences: Huron Pottery was predominantly buff clay with yellow glaze and New Hamburg had red clay with olive glaze – a difference that can be explained by access to raw materials. Perhaps more interesting is how the shaping and style of New Hamburg pottery was more characteristic of pots found at William Eby's site in Conestogo, suggesting that Waterloo Region had a style unique unto itself. One can't help but be tantalized by what secrets remain to be discovered, but for now, the old earthenware remains in the earth.

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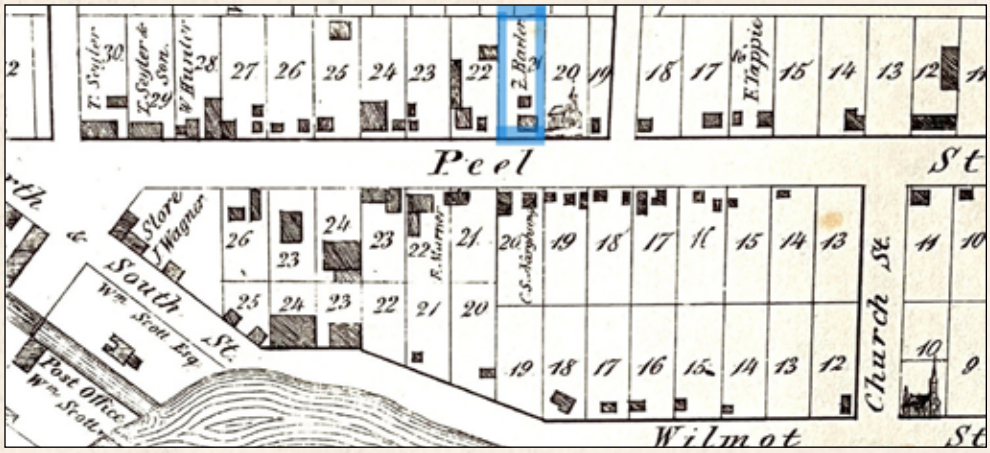
An earthenware vase from New Hamburg Pottery *(John Wine Collection, photo by Jon Dunford, Miller & Miller Auctions).*



A detail of the "Plan of the Village of Hamburgh 1854," by M.C. Schofield *(Kitchener Public Library, Grace Schmidt Room).*


New Hamburg Pottery

Joseph Bœhler

begs to announce to the Public that he has taken charge of the above Pottery hitherto carried on by his father, Mr. X. Boehler.

Having had a long experience in the trade he is confident of giving complete satisfaction and therefore begs to solicit a liberal support.

EARTHENWARE of all kinds, of prime quality and at lowest prices, always on hand.

New Hamburg, November 26th 1881. 44—t.f.

An advertisement from the November 26, 1881 edition of the New Hamburg Independent *(Township of Wilmot Archives).*

A Pioneer House Treasure Hunt

By Fred Lichti

It was not a tough decision to tear it down. "Nothing lasts forever" and in rural Ontario, many pioneer farmhouses and old timber bank barns had already been replaced with modern buildings. So, Dave and Kim Ruby of Perth East made the same decision about their 1855 farmhouse. Sure, they would lose the house in which Dave and four generations of his ancestors had lived, but they said, "The stone foundation had started shifting and the walls and rooms were no longer square. The brick basement would always flood... and the costs of restoration were just too much." The house was demolished in 2012.

This Old House

Dave's Alsatian ancestors, Peter and Barbara Zehr, arrived in Wilmot Township around 1839. Although George Capling was the first European occupant of Lot 11, Concession II, South Easthope Township, the Zehrs appeared on the 1842 census. Peter Zehr (1809-1898) was not only a farmer and the first resident preacher of the East Zorra Amish Mennonite Church, but he arrived in Upper Canada as a medical doctor. Dr. Zehr practised medicine in Berlin (since renamed Kitchener), Wilmot Township and the community where they lived. From their first harvest of wheat, Barbara had baked bread and shared some with the Indigenous families who still camped along the stream that flowed through their farm.

As they became more established and outgrew their log cabin, Barbara and Peter made plans to build a large, brick house with an examination room for his medical practice. From knolls on the farm, the Zehrs dug clay and fired their own bricks in a makeshift kiln in the field. Dave remembers his parents pointing to that spot in a field where remnants of the brick firing process could still be seen. Completed in 1855, the two-story house had three-brick thick walls, incredibly deep window wells, a wrap-around veranda and a full attic. Within the shadow of the pioneer house, the Rubys built a new house in the summer of 2012.

Treasures from the Past

Before demolition day, Dave and Kim, with the assistance of Dave's mother, Isabel Ruby, cleaned out the sprawling old house. No priceless paintings or stash of gold coins were found, but treasures of another kind were discovered. From the nooks and crannies of the Dawdy Haus, the upstairs and attic, the Rubys found the deed for their farm, handwritten documents, old books and four fabric art pieces. From the old farmhouse where she and her husband, Vernon, had raised their family of four, Isabel took many boxes of items to her home in Tavistock. It was some years later that Isabel called me to say that she had two boxes of old books and documents, mostly in the German language, that had been salvaged from their old farmhouse. "I know that you take an interest in history," she said, "and I'd be happy to give this stuff to you. Maybe you could explore the material and assess its historical value..." I gladly picked up the boxes in Tavistock and began the adventure of identifying the contents.

Many Books

One hundred years in an attic was damaging to the books. Most of them had broken or brittle bindings, loose covers and missing or water-stained pages. Nonetheless, this attic book collection is a historian's treasure trove!

Print material in English was the easiest to identify. There was a will dated 1934 and the 1846 deed for the farm. Family lore says that Dr. Zehr traveled on foot from the farm to the Canada Company office in Goderich to pick up this deed.

Most of the old books were of a religious nature – Bibles, hymnals, church history and theology – all in the German language. There were catechism books that had been used in baptism preparation and many copies of a prayer book that the Amish brought with them from Europe, Die Ernsthafte Christenpflicht (Prayer Book for Earnest Christians). This book was first first printed in 1708, most likely of Palatine origin, and is still used in Amish worship services.

Also, from the attic came the hymnbook entitled Ausbund. The Ausbund comprises more than 800 pages and is nicknamed, Das dicke Buch (the thick book). It is considered to be the oldest Protestant hymnbook in continuous use and is still used in Old Order Amish worship. Many of the songs were written by Anabaptists who were imprisoned in the dungeons of the castle of

The house built by Dr. Peter and Barbara Zehr in 1855. The outside walls were of triple brick construction, and the inside walls of double brick. There was a full attic and a porch is said to have almost completely surrounded the entire house. Sometime in the mid 20th century, the bricks were covered with stucco. *(All photos collected by Fred Licthi).*

Passau on the Danube River (Bavaria) between 1535 and 1540. Many of them were later martyred. This particular Ausbund was published in 1846 and is identical to others that were used in the worship services of the East Zorra congregation from its earliest days until around 1900. Without any musical notations, tunes for Ausbund hymns are passed down from generation to generation.

In addition to the many religious books, there were some German and English public school textbooks and a rare copy of a book entitled, "Des Farmer's Handbuch fur die Behandlung von Pferden, Rindvieh, Schafen und Schwinen" (The Farmer's Handbook for the Treatment of Horses, Cattle, Sheep and Pigs). Published in 1879 by the "Colonial Office" in Stratford, Ontario, the author was John Payne of New Hamburg. Based on "thirty years of experience", Payne wrote about the care of livestock and various potions and treatments for their ailments. The health of livestock directly impacted the rural economy and made the care of animals an essential part of farming. The Upper Canada Veterinary School in Guelph provided training for veterinarians; however, having only been established in 1862, there was at that time no surplus of veterinarians. No doubt, Payne's handbook was of great value to self-sufficient farmers.

Neatly folded in a family Bible were two large posters, one called Geistlicher Irrgarten or "Spiritual Labyrinth" and the other Das Goldene ABC or "The Golden ABCs." With antecedents in medieval Europe, both were used as Christian education tools. In a time before Sunday School, libraries or screens, they would have provided entertainment for children or adults on a Sunday afternoon.

Language Transition

Dr. Peter Zehr and his descendants were part of the Amish Church in South Easthope-East Zorra. Established in 1837 by settlers from Wilmot Township and immigrants from German-speaking lands in Europe, this congregation used German in its services for the first 100 years. Known today as the East Zorra Mennonite Church, the younger generation lost the ability to read High German by the 1930s. Although rarely written, Deitsch (Pennsylvania German) continued to be the first language of this community for another generation. What happened to the many German language books that had been so precious to previous generations? Most were discarded, burned or buried. Dave Ruby's ancestors simply carried them to the attic.

Fabric Art Pieces

Much to her surprise, Isabel found the neatly folded, fabric art pieces in the Daadi Haus (Grandpa house). Hidden in a drawer and protected from the fading effects of sunlight, the three samplers and a show towel were vibrant and colourful, as if the maker had just finished them. Dated between 1875 to 1881, they were all created by Dave's great grandmother, Anna (Ruby) Zehr (1863-1938).

As was the custom in many local families, aging grandparents often moved into the Daadi Haus when the younger generation took over the farm. After the death of her husband in 1935, Anna Zehr moved into this sprawling farmhouse with her daughter, Lena. She brought with her the embroidered fabrics that she had sewn in her teenage years. Anna died in 1938 and four decades later, so did her daughter, Lena. No one living knew about Anna's fabric art until Isabel rediscovered them.

Connections

I asked Dave and Kim what the youngest generation of the Ruby family thinks about these "treasures"? Their daughter, nieces and nephews have warm memories of the old farmhouse as the place where they spent time with their grandparents. "But," they said, "seeing the beautiful fabric art pieces does make them curious."

Who was this young girl who spent hours

Isabel Ruby and her three children examining the books. L-R: Dave, Anita, Isabel and Leon.


Des Farmer's Handbuch,

— für die —

Behandlung

— von —

Pferden, Rindvieh, Schafen

und Schweinen,

— aus —

dreißig-jähriger Erfahrung,

— von —

John Payne, New-Hamburg, Ont.

Preis, $2.00

1879.

Title page from the farmer's handbook written by John Payne of New Hamburg in 1879: advice on the care and treatment of livestock.

and hours with needle in hand, counting stitches, replicating decorative patterns and symbols? At one time learning sewing skills was a way to develop self-discipline and the abilities needed to manage a household and care for a family. Kim observed that these old things come from "a very different time." Although from a different era, antiques and artifacts have power to connect us to our ancestors, to the lives that they lived and the things that they held dear – values like self-discipline, ingenuity, hard work, frugality, humility, and faith.

The Rubys couldn't save Dr. Peter Zehr's pioneer house, but they did salvage some skids of his handmade clay bricks. They used these bricks to build the fireplace in their new farmhouse, maintaining a connection to their ingenious ancestor. Kim said, "I'm much more aware now of the need to tell the stories, but not just for ourselves. If we don't share these stories, how will the future generations know?"


Ausbund,

Das ist:

Etliche schöne

Christliche Lieder,

Allen und jeden Christen,

Welcher Religion sie seyen,

Nebst einem Anhang von 6 Liedern.

Copy of the Anabaptist hymnbook, Ausbund, the oldest Protestant hymnal in continuous use.


Die Ernsthafte

Christenpflicht,

enthaltend

Schöne geistreiche Gebete;

das

Glaubens Bekenntniß

der

Mennoniten,

mit einem Anhang über die Wehrlosigkeit;

Und das

Geistliche Lustgärtlein

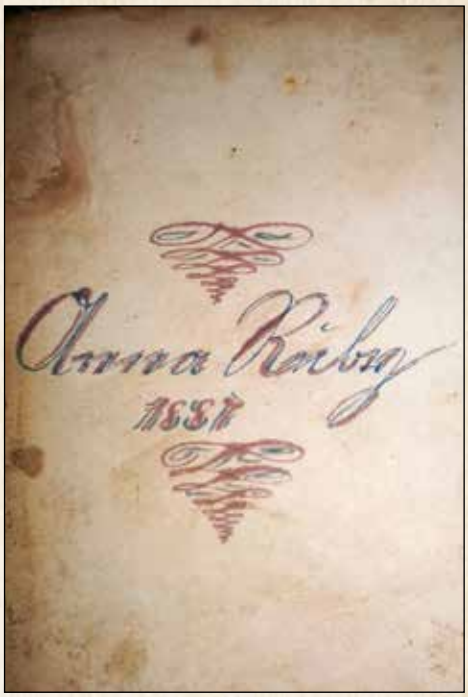
frommer Seelen.

Berlin, Canada:

Herausgegeben von Oberholtzer u. Co.

1878.

One of the numerous German prayer books that had been stored in the attic for about a century.



Signature of Anna Ruby Zehr in her prayer book.

Three generations examining Great Grandmother Anna Ruby Zehr's fabric arts – Isabel, daughter-in-law Linda, granddaughter Leah, daughter Anita and daughter-in-law Kim.

A poem frequently included in Mennonite fabric art is found on Anna's 1875 sampler, done when she was 12 years old. She included the same poem on her 1881 show towel. Das Gras ist Grin, Die Ros ist Roth, Hir stet mein Namen, Nach meinem Tod. (The grass is green, the rose is red. Here stands my name when I am dead)

Samplers depicting the alphabet, numbers, decorative birds and floral patterns with the maker's name and date were made by young women to learn sewing skills. Anna Ruby Zehr created three samplers and a show towel between the age of 12 and 18.

Anna Ruby's 1881 Show Towel, made at the age of 18.

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Bread and Butter:

The Backbone of 19th-Century Ontario

By Brigitte Hasbron

Bread and butter, delicious staples that have been favoured throughout generations, were a lifeline for many people living in Ontario, Canada in the mid-19th century. Most of us today bask in the joy and simplicity of eating a warm piece of bread adorned with a generous amount of butter, but for those living in 1867, this simple pleasure was sometimes considered salvation to survive the gruelling working conditions of that time.

Brigitte Hasbron, left, learning the pioneer art of making bread.
(Photo credit: Brigitte Hasbron)

When we examine that period of Canadian history, the all-too-familiar saying, "Earning your bread and butter," resonates as it refers to making a living and securing the essentials for survival. My deep dive into Canadian Diet for families in the mid-19th century proved that bread and butter were more than just staples, they were symbols of stability, tradition, and comfort, especially for working-class families.

History has taught us that the formation of the Dominion of Canada on July 1, 1867, signified an economic boom like no other, thanks to industrialization, canals, and railroads. During this time in Canada's history, the place where a person lived mainly dictated the kind of job they could have. According to Statistics Canada's records, "the people of the Western Part of the New Confederation are almost exclusively occupied in Agricultural pursuits; in the Far East, the Fisheries monopolize their labor; in the Central portion, Lumbering is an important industry; while Manufacturing begins to be of consequence in many of the cities, and Mining in a few outlying districts." Out of 837,718 recorded labourers, approximately 41% (342,649) of jobs were on the farm – this meant bushels of wheat, potatoes and oats being produced and at a very profitable margin. "In 1866, the top agricultural export was flour, with a value of $5.2 million. The second most valuable export was raw barley and rye, with a value of $4.6 million, and the third was raw wheat, with a value of $3.1 million."

New Beginnings

One of the sentiments outlined and emphasized in most Canadian archives I read was that life in Ontario during the mid-19th century was a blend of hard work, community, and the beginnings of a new nation. With this new nation, the welcoming of new Canadian immigrants with diverse backgrounds from various countries significantly impacted the "Canadian Diet." As one can imagine, a sense of belonging in a new and unfamiliar land was at the forefront for the new settlers. Their dishes not only nourished the body but also brought much comfort in their new beginning, all the while preserving their cultural identities.

Key cultural contributions

Indigenous Traditions: Indigenous Peoples introduced settlers to local ingredients like wild game, berries, and corn. Techniques such as smoking and drying were adopted for preserving food.

French Influence: French settlers brought culinary techniques and dishes like stews, pâtés, and bread-making, which were adapted to include Canadian ingredients.

British and Scottish Roots: Pies, puddings, and oat-based dishes reflected British and Scottish culinary traditions, often modified to suit the Canadian environment.

German Roots: Especially in what is now Waterloo Region, the styles of cuisine brought by Mennonite, Amish and Lutheran newcomers from Germany, Alsace and Switzerland have had a lasting impact on the food culture of this part of Ontario.

Fusion of Cultures: Settlers often com-

bined their traditional recipes with Indigenous ingredients, creating unique dishes that reflected the blending of cultures.

Women's Influence on the Canadian Diet

Gaining a better understanding that life was all about agriculture, I learned that all family members, including children, worked on farms, growing vital crops to ensure financial security. And women played a pivotal role, from planting, harvesting, and managing crops, to doing household tasks like cooking, cleaning, and preserving food. Furthermore, they cared for livestock and contributed to the family's income by selling produce, dairy products, and handmade goods. Despite their significant contributions, women's work was often undervalued and considered part of their domestic duties. However, their roles changed the lives of their families and communities, and their practices and know-how have impacted our diets today.

While examining the ways women influenced the family diet in 1867, I realized that I could not solely rely on history books for information. I discovered two highly influential cookbooks that changed domestic life and shaped our Canadian culinary identity.

The bread master working his craft at the Upper Canada Village Bakery.
(Photo credit: Brigitte Hasbron)

Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management by Isabella Beeton contains over 2,000 recipes and practical guidance on cooking, household management, child-rearing, health, budgeting, and domestic duties. It is said that Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management is "possibly one of the most important sources for understanding middle-class cooking, food customs, and domestic life in the British Empire in 1867, including Canada."

The Cook Not Mad (author unknown), is often considered as Canada's first English-language cookbook. Originally published in 1830 in New York, it was reprinted in Kingston, Ontario, in 1831, making it widely available to Canadian households. By 1867, the book had already played a significant role in defining early Canadian cuisine, offering recipes that blended Indigenous, British, American, French, Italian, and Middle Eastern influences.

Summer baking season at Cook's Tavern at Upper Canada Village. *(Photo credit: Upper Canada Village.)*

The different stages of milling flour at Upper Canada Village. *(Photo credit: Brigitte Hasbron)*

It helped new immigrants adapt to North American ingredients like turkey, squash, cornmeal, and cranberries, which were unfamiliar to many European settlers.

In mid-19th century urban households, food choices were shaped by availability, affordability, and tradition, reflecting both economic constraints and cultural influences. Families balanced staple ingredients with occasional luxuries, creating meals that were both practical and comforting. Listed below are a few ingredients and their historical background.

Urban Family Notes:

Protein: Meat was more expensive in towns. Salt pork was the staple. Fresh meat like chicken or beef was usually reserved for Sunday or special occasions. Leftovers were reused creatively.

Dairy: Milk, butter, and cheese came from the family's own cow or a neighbour.

Bread: Purchased from bakeries or baked at home if an oven was available. Bread was often reused in puddings or toast.

Vegetables: Seasonal and somewhat expensive. Potatoes, carrots, onions, cabbage, and turnips were staples. Often stored in a root cellar.

Fish: Freshwater fish were sold in urban markets, sometimes more affordable than meat (especially on Fridays).

Drinks: Tea was a constant, even among the poor. Coffee was less common, often reserved for elites or special guests. Alcohol (beer or cider) might appear on weekends or among men in taverns.

Treats: Simple puddings, preserved fruits, or molasses-based baked goods were weekend or Sunday luxuries.

Sweeteners: Molasses was cheaper than refined sugar. Maple syrup was a seasonal luxury.

Preservation: Due to the lack of large cellars or cool spaces, preservation was limited to smoking, pickling, salt-curing, canning with sugar or vinegar, and storing dried goods. Many homes preserved fruit during summer and used it in winter desserts.

Going back in time

In my opinion, books and archived documents can only do so much in terms of providing an authentic perspective on life over a hundred and fifty years ago. So, I decided to go back in time. Thanks to the lovely individuals at the Upper Canada Village in Morrisburg, Ontario, I had the unique pleasure of experiencing life in a rural English Canadian setting in the mid-19th century.

I was more than just a guest – I was completely immersed in the era's character. From head to toe, I donned a whole period costume, each piece meticulously crafted to reflect the time. Every detail was astonishing – the petticoat, skirt, bodice, hat, gloves, shawl, boots, and the delicate reticule, each element transporting me further into history. I absorbed everything around me, embracing the experience wholeheartedly. I had been told that wearing the attire and walking in the footsteps of those who came before allows history to seep into your soul, and that feeling was undeniable.

The moment had arrived for my journey through time, a hands-on immersion into baking bread and churning fresh butter, the essence of 19th-century culinary tradition. Under the guidance of warm, knowledgeable interpreters, I stepped into the heart of Cook's Tavern, a stately red-brick haven steeped in history. The warmth of the roaring fire in the rustic kitchen, combined with the intoxicating aroma of freshly baked bread, was sheer bliss!

Being the butter lover that I am, I knew I'd really enjoy the churning butter process. From agitating the cream using a churn and draining the buttermilk (the farm pigs would benefit from this process), to washing, kneading, salting and shaping the butter, every step was mesmerizing. The taste was pure heaven! It had such a velvety texture with the right amount of salt to amplify the flavour and subtly affect the creamy texture. If that wasn't enough, I also had the opportunity to visit the flour mill, the cheese factory, the summer and winter kitchens, the bakery, the tinsmith's shop and the farmer's gardens. Finally, the pièce de résistance was an invitation to sit down and share a communal meal in one of the period dining rooms. Such warm hospitality, a truly unique and memorable experience!

As my adventure in history drew to a close, I gained a deeper appreciation for the significance of bread and butter in the Canadian diet. These staples were more than just food—they represented economic stability, essential nutrition, and for some, even survival. Beyond sustenance, bread and butter carried profound social and cultural importance, shaping the daily lives of those in the mid-19th century. Surrounded by artifacts from the past, the process of making bread and butter became a living history lesson, allowing me to connect with the farmers and housewives who once relied on these simple yet vital provisions. I will never look at bread and butter the same!

Brigitte Hasbron is owner of The Food Tease (www.thefoodtease.ca), a combined culinary and travel blog that highlights the best that food, wine, and travel have to offer.

The author learning how to master the bellows at Upper Canada Village. *(Photo credit: Brigitte Hasbron)*

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SINCE 1979, NEW HAMBURG HAS REVVED UP WITH MOPARFEST

By Rod Charles

Every year hundreds of car enthusiasts from all over North America gather in New Hamburg for an auto show known as Moparfest.

Canada is no stranger to car shows and you have probably heard of heavy-hitters such as Toronto's Canadian International AutoShow and the Vancouver International Auto Show.

Wilmot Township may not be in the same weight class as Toronto or Vancouver but at 1,500 vehicles, Moparfest is the largest all-Mopar cars show in Canada and the second largest in North America behind the Carlisle Chrysler Nationals in Pennsylvania, which features over 2,800 Mopar vehicles.

"Gary Hoffman was the man who hosted and started the 1979 Moparfest, the very first," said Arena Coordinator George Schertzer, who has volunteered at Moparfest since 1996. "He had a 67 Charger and wanted to start a car club for Chargers. A couple of his Mopar buddies said instead of a club for Chargers, why not have a club for all Chrysler brands, makes and models? So they put the word out and had their first show."

The festival started in 1979 by the OCC Auto Club as a Charger show and over time expanding into a two-day show. According to their website, in 2023 there were 1,527 Mopar show vehicles and around 15,000 spectators. Today the show supports several charities and community groups, including the New Hamburg Optimist Club, New Hamburg Lion & Lioness Club and New Hamburg Firebirds Hockey.

The largest of its kind in the country, Moparfest has morphed into one of the most popular vehicle shows in the nation. Despite this, odds are if you live outside Waterloo Region you may not have heard of it. This festival may not be the first word that comes to mind when thinking of major auto shows but that should change.

What exactly in the world is a 'Mopar'?

Before going any further let's deal with the elephant - or in this case the Viper V10 engine - in the room. The question that is probably burning in your mind right now, especially if you are not a gear head, is what in the world is 'mopar'?

Don't be embarrassed by your lack of Mopar-ish wisdom – I had to do some research to figure out that answer myself. Johnny Hunkins of Motortrend.com was kind enough to fill in the blanks and broke it down this way in his informative article fittingly entitled **What's a Mopar?**: "When talking with an enthusiast, a Mopar car is one built by one of the original Chrysler Corp. brands, which in order of ascendancy are Plymouth, Dodge, DeSoto, Ram, Chrysler, and Imperial. Out of those original legacy brands, only Dodge, Ram, and Chrysler remain. These legacy brands aren't the only ones considered Mopars: Chrysler bought the AMC, Eagle, and Jeep brands in 1987, and as a result Mopar cognoscenti welcomed Jeep (the only one of the three to survive) as part of the modern Mopar brand family."

If you are scratching your head and trying to figure out why you have never seen a "Mopar" at your local Chrysler dealership or heard the name before, it's because there is no actual car brand called "Mopar." The term has been widely conflated to mean cars of North American Chrysler Corporation lineage. Mopar occasionally offers branded vehicles (through limited dealership channels) equipped with Mopar parts and accessories.

It may come across as pretty specific for a car show but to the people who know and love these vehicles, Moparfest is an early Christmas present and a true provincial gem.

Classic Chrysler brand cars, food, and fun – all part of New Hamburg's Moparfest each August. *(All photos courtesy the the Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette)*

A Love Letter to Chrysler

Schertzer, who owns a 74 Dodge Challenger, says his favourite cars are from the late sixties, early seventies. He loves those cars from that era because they have so many cool features about them. He believes Moparfest is awesome because it brings people who love cars together.

"It's a good way to bring people together and support the community in a way that provides a financial benefit and recognition for the township," says Schertzer. "People also gather ahead of the festival on the Friday night for the downtown street cruise car show in New Hamburg. People get to see some of the cars, downtown stores open longer, it's a lot of fun."

One of the interesting things about Moparfest are the family connections. George Schertzer was involved with Moparfest along with his late wife Cat Conway. Both of his daughters, Michelle and Sarah, are involved as well. Other families including the Stanleys, Blezeffers, and more than 200 volunteers continue to participate and build lasting relationships at the festival.

"Our festival started as a Charger show in Heidelberg, just outside of Waterloo," said Moparfest event coordinator Michelle Schertzer, who is George Schertzer's daughter. "Moparfest is hosting its 44th annual all Mopar car show in New Hamburg on August 16, 17, 2025. Moparfest hosts around 1,500 Mopar show vehicles over the two-day event, and even during a rainy event in 2023, we still had just over 1,000 show vehicles on display."

The annual gear-head festival was founded in 1979.

Still, I have to say that I was a bit surprised that New Hamburg hosted such a hidden, humungous – and dare I say specific – event. No offense to the Township of Wilmot but when you think of cities that host major car shows Tokyo, Detroit, Toronto and Paris, France are what come to mind.

New Hamburg may not have the deep pockets and urban glitz of those cities but it more than makes up for that with a small town feel and welcoming vibe. While the festival is successful at drawing people who love vehicles, many attend the festival to see interesting cars and make friends. In other words, you don't have to know what a poppet valve or a kingpin is to have a great time at Moparfest.

Although truth be told, it probably wouldn't hurt.

Feeling the Need for Speed

"Over the past 43 years that we've done this, I think a lot of people make friends,

Moparfest takes on the look of a small town, spread all through the showground.

they come back for that unity feeling, they're all there to enjoy the vehicles," says Michelle Schertzer, who is also George's daughter. Schertzer explained that that Moparfest is a not-for-profit corporation and all funds are donated back to the local community. "So, it is a very specific car festival, but I think it's also the amount of vehicles you can see in one place, the range of years of vehicles, and all the people who are there to have a good time that make our event special."

Moparfest is partly staged in the indoor, New Hamburg Community Centre arena with 20+ rare, custom, or freshly restored high end Mopar vehicles on display under cover. Thousands more are parked in rows in Norm Hill Park. Last year, they had vehicles ranging from 1933 – 2024. The festival featured 190 automotive vendors, 35 flea market vendors and 14 food trucks.

This festival is all about classy cars, family and friends. Nobody will ever confuse New Hamburg with Tokyo, Detroit, Toronto or Paris but when it comes to Mopars, this community is in a weight class by itself.

Moparfest Information

Website: www.moparfest.com/

Date: August 16-17, 2025

Time: 8am-4pm, rain or shine

Showgrounds: 21 Jacob Street, New Hamburg, Ontario

Details: $20 per person entry. Free spectator shuttle bus to and from free spectator parking. Vehicles are $45 pre-registered, or $50 at the gate. This includes the vehicles and 2 adults for the weekend.

Some of the best in class cars are on show inside the arena.

All the car enthusiasts want a look under the hood.

Stories in Stone

By Paul Knowles

Wandering around cemeteries may seem a tad morbid, but the truth is, cemeteries are amazing archives of historical facts. A stroll through some of the many cemeteries in Wilmot township and area will inevitably teach the visitor a lot about local history. You will discover information about some of the earliest European occupiers of the area, and perhaps also be reminded of the biographical details of more recent residents.

Wilmot's cemeteries vary in size from Riverside, the large New Hamburg burial ground, to the small cemeteries on Christner Road and beside the former Zion Evangelical Lutheran church on Erb's Road. Some are still in operation, like the St. James Anglican Chapel of Ease cemetery on the Huron Road; some have ceased operation, such as the Pine Hill Cemetery.

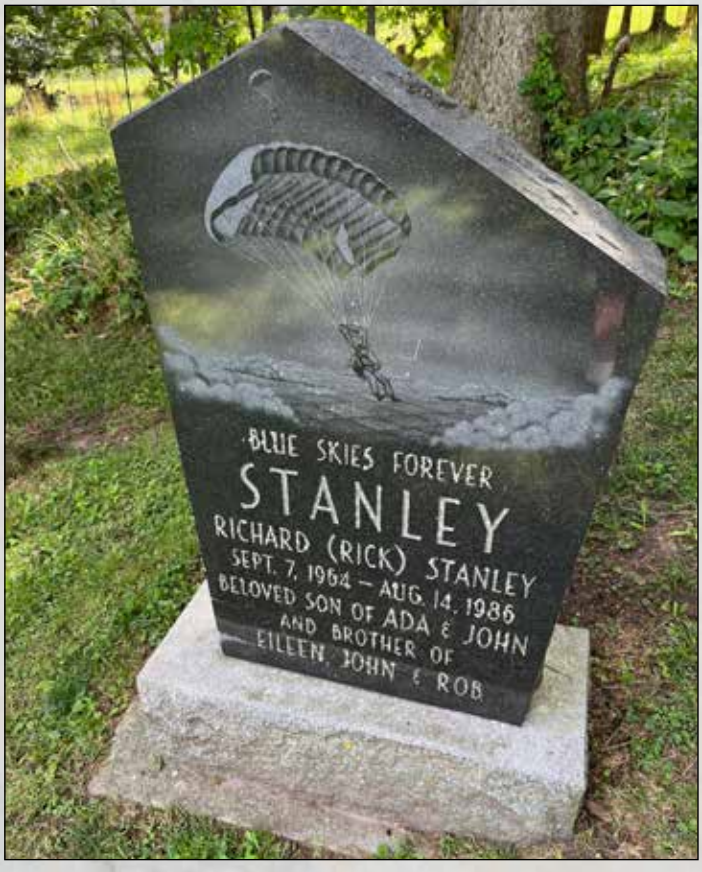
One thing they have in common: they all will reward a thoughtful, observant visit to these sacred places of rest. The photos in this article are just a few examples of some of the unique gravestones and details to be found in our local cemeteries.

The gravestone of Rev. John Honderich and his wife, Vernonica Roth, is located in the Christner Road cemetery. The statistical details and scripture texts are interesting, but perhaps most intriguing in the last line about Rev. Honderich: "First male child born in Wilmot township." That would have been in 1826, several years before New Hamburg was founded. Of course, this claim ignores the reality of Indigenous occupation of the area for centuries prior to the coming of the European settlers. *(Photos by Paul Knowles)*

This striking memorial in the Baden cemetery marks the final resting place of the Livingston family, of Castle Kilbride fame: James and Louise Livingston (James died in 1920; Louise in 1904) and their children, several of whom died quite young.

Near the Livingston memorial is this dramatic gravestone with the simple plaque: "To the Glory of God in loving memory of our parents Wilfred & Florence Nauman who will always be in our hearts."

The gravestone of Paul and Anna Katharina Herber, in the St. Agatha Lutheran cemetery, is just one of many Wilmot memorials in the township that are written in German, the language used by most of the early European settlers who came to the north part of the township.



A more recent market at St. James is the unique memorial for Rick Stanley, whose passion was skydiving and base jumping… and who died participating in his hobby.

The Shrine of the Sorrowful Mother is a unique feature of the St. Agatha Roman Catholic Cemetery.

Near the Shrine, are several iron crosses making unidentified graves; the crosses seem to replicate the cross atop the Shrine.

Once one of three Anglican churches in Wilmot township, St. James on Huron Road is now a "Chapel of Ease", as the chapel of a still-operating cemetery. The graveyard has historic memorials, including some mounted on frames beside the church, and modern stones as well.

Some of the heritage markers at St. James record birth dates of earlier settlers – like members of the Tye family – going back to the 1700s.

One of the more recent gravestones to be found in Wilmot cemeteries is that of local business leaders Vernon and Viola Erb. This memorial, in the Steinmann Mennonite Church cemetery on Snyder's Road, honours the Erbs' contribution to the economic life of the community through their creation of Erb Transport.

The opposite side of the Erb tombstone gives evidence of their faith.

The stone marker that is the centrepiece of the small cemetery at Erb's Road and Sandhills Road is not a tombstone – it commemorates the 1837 immigration to Wilmot of Michael Wilhelm and his wife, Margaret Wettlaufer.

Near the commemorative stone structure is the memorial of a descendent of Michael and Margaret.

This enclosure in New Hamburg's Riverside Cemetery includes many of the earliest grave markers.

One of the stones set into the Riverside enclosure tells a too-common story – the death of a child in the early days of Wilmot. Henry Seyler lived less than a month after his birth in December, 1859.

1874

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