



Woodstock, Ontario

Newsletter 2006 July



Photo 1

145 Delatre Street

photo by Eleanor Gardhouse

Upcoming Monthly Meetings & Events

- Jul & Aug** No monthly meetings during July and August.. Have a great summer!
- Thu Sep 14** Annual supper meeting, hosted by OGS Oxford County Branch at Copa Cabana Steak House. Doug Symons speaks about 'The Infamous of Oxford County (the other ones!)'.
- Wed Oct 25** June Flath, researching for her book on the history of Eastwood, shares with us some of what she has found.
- Wed Nov 29** Marie Avey, Norwich historian, tells a tale of 1837 or, 'Reform Norwich vs. Tory Woodstock'.

Our meetings are held on the last Wednesday of the month from September to May, inclusive, in the Grand Hall of Woodstock Museum, NHS, at 7:30 p.m., except where noted. All are welcome.

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Oxford Historical Society Committee Members

Honorary President.	Ed Bennett
Past President.	Fred Freeman
President.	Jim Groulx
Vice President.	
Treasurer	Jack Hedges
Secretary.	Chris Packman
Membership	Mary Liley
Research	Mary Liley
Archives/Architecture.	Eleanor Gardhouse
Director, Museum Liaison. . .	Karen Houston
Newsletter/Computers	Chris Packman

Our Street Address

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Our Mailing Address

Oxford Historical Society
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Web Site: www.execulink.com/~ocbogs

Email: ocbogs@execulink.com

Membership

Standard \$20/year; Family \$25/year

History Archives

We have atlases, biographies, business index, oral history tapes and court records.

In total, we have over 31,000 papers, documents and other items of local historical interest listed in our easy-to-search computer database.

Editor's Corner

Photograph – Front Page

Photo 1 on page 1, "145 Delatre Street", is one of a series taken by Eleanor Gardhouse of 31 Woodstock buildings that have been designated as 'Historic'. It was photographed for the Heritage Woodstock Committee.

This private house, built in 1846, was first owned by John Douglas, owner of the local tannery. He also served on the Board of Education, and was its chairman in 1880 when Central School was built.

History Source: 'Heritage Woodstock, Architectural and Historical Properties', a 33-page booklet available at Woodstock Museum.

Meetings Posted on the Internet

Details of the upcoming meetings listed on page 1 are also posted on the internet at <http://www.execulink.com/~ocbogs>. We invite you to come on out and hear our guest speakers. All are welcome.

Annual Supper Meeting At Copa Cabana Steak House

hosted by OGS Oxford County Branch

- Thursday 2006 **September 14**
- At 6:30pm
- COST per ticket is \$15.00 all inclusive
(meal, drinks, tip and speaker)!



Doug Symons will be speaking on
"The Infamous of Oxford County
(the other ones!)"

Tickets available from early July at Old Registry Office,
(northwest corner Hunter & Graham). All welcome

President's Message

With summer break arriving, we can look back on a busy year for the Oxford Historical Society. Our final monthly general meeting (May 31) reminded me of the song titled, "Lights Out". A storm caused a power failure that evening, but when I arrived at the museum, there were many enthusiastic individuals ready to hear our guest speaker, Christopher Cooper.

Our treasurer, Jack Hedges, is a bit less worried about how to pay the rent now that we are holding bingos to produce revenue for our Society. I helped with the first one and rather enjoyed it. We intend to have several more bingos in the next few months, and have applied to hold more next year.

It is our intention to have more communication with the other Historical Societies of Oxford County. There is so much information about the County that we (or perhaps I, for one) do not know.

It was a proud moment to see Ed Bennett receive an Urban Institute Award at the Royal York Hotel in early June. It was presented in the "Local Hero" category, and he certainly deserved it.

We have purchased a new computer, sharing the cost with the Genealogy Society. We still need more up to date computers, so if anyone has a computer (Windows 98, or newer), and wishes to donate it to the Society, we would be most appreciative.

The long awaited video on Joe Boyle, produced by OMNI TV, will soon be shown at the Woodstock's Market Centre Theatre (likely on Aug. 5). The video will also include background scenes of Woodstock.

In September, some of our members will be tour guides at the Courthouse for "Doors Open". Fred Freeman will be guarding the cannon, so no one runs off with it. I doubt, though, he will be firing any coins from the barrel.

Karen Houston has been very generous by allowing us to make use of the Museum facilities for our meetings.

At this time, I would like to thank our Executive and volunteers for the many hours of work they have put in, making the Society an important part of our City heritage.

See you in September.

Jim Groulx

Events Since Last Newsletter

General Meeting, Wednesday Apr 26

Our guest speakers, Katie Nice assisted by Karen Houston, both of Woodstock Museum, presented an interesting series of mystery digital photographs from the Museum's extensive collection. The audience was asked to guess what each picture was, and when and where it might have been taken.

The first photo looked strangely familiar: a Welcome to Woodstock sign. But it was not the one at the Dundas exit from Highway 401 into Woodstock, it was the one on County Road 59, southbound into Woodstock.

Other pictures showed a much earlier Woodstock: ranging from one of Sid Coppins driving an car in the early 1900s to the more graphic: a fire at Firestone Textiles in the later 1920s; one burning at 380 Hunter Street when it was home to the CKOX radio studios in the late 1940s; a burning army barracks (date unknown) at the Fairgrounds; and the still-smoking ruins inside a fire-gutted building.

Katie has been on contract with Woodstock Museum from January until July, replacing the Museum's Archivist, Adam Pollard, on leave of absence.

Commemorative Service, Col. Joe Boyle's Gravesite, Thursday May 11

It poured on May 11, the day Romanians celebrate their heroes, but all present had umbrellas and each added their own good spirit to the occasion. This was maybe the twelfth such annual event around Joe Boyle's grave.

Mary Bennett had arranged transport from Parklawn, London, for Ed Bennett to attend. He appeared by taxi, in a wheel chair. "I'm wearing a suit, ... for the first time in five years," he said, looking around with a very happy smile, holding an umbrella and being warmly greeted by many friends and well-wishers.

The Sentinel Review had Elliot Ferguson and a reporter there. Romania was represented in the persons of Maria Cojocuru and her husband, though the expected Consul General did not arrive. We were at least 15, though while holding my own umbrella still in the strong wind, attempting to shield Ed from the rain and also trying to take pictures, I forgot to accurately count!

Soon after 11 a.m., Jim Groulx opened proceedings by asking Councillor Pat Sobeski for a few words. Pat obliged with a short, amusing anecdote, which ended with a plug for Canadian history.

Rev. Eleanor Caruana, minister of Ed's church, Church of the Good Shepherd, conducted a brief service and blessing. Soon, we all hurried back to our vehicles and shelter - many returning with Mary for a light lunch at the Bennett's family home on Vincent Street.

Silver Dollar Bingo, Monday May 22

Volunteers Jack & Jane Hedges, Eleanor Gardhouse, Jim Groulx and Chris Packman staffed a matinee bingo on Victoria Day.

The monthly revenue from bingos is shared between the bingo hall and the non-profit groups who hold bingo sessions. Though bingo revenue is down these days – our bingo only had 51 players - the City makes up the 'take' each non-profit gets to a more acceptable total. This extra money comes from part of the tax the City collects the Slots operation at the Fairgrounds. The return from bingos does help the Society, but we do need more volunteers. Please phone or email the Old Registry Office (see page 2) if you can help. Thanks!

Volunteers for the next bingo are needed at the Silver Dollar on:

Fri July 14 between 5:15 p.m. and 10:45 p.m.

General Meeting, Wednesday May 31

A city-wide power cut after lightning struck the hydro line between London and Woodstock didn't deter members and guests attending a lively evening presentation on heritage preservation by Dr. Chris Cooper, an internationally-known architect and expert on the subject. Though unable to show the digital slide pictures he had brought, he gave an amusing description of his early years of training, his three years as an eager jack-of-all trades on the CBS TV show 'This Old House', then switched tone and spoke with passion on the need to preserve our building heritage. "We don't really own the homes in which we live. We are caretakers for our descendants." "The U.K. has designated over a half million buildings as heritage ... Canada has designated under nine thousand."

He asked the age of houses that audience members lived in: the oldest was an 1840s brick building that its current owner was restoring. Chris spoke of the work often done on older homes. "Many of us don't restore, instead we renovate out of sheer ignorance. We replace wooden windows, hand-made by craftsmen long ago, with modern ones of PVC (plastic). With a touch of paint to maintain a seal against the elements, wooden windows and doors can last well over a century. Plastic ones often come with a warranty for ten years and break down within twenty." He went on to give useful 'how-to' tips (and mentioned the courses he was presently running at Blenheim Farms, near Drumbo, in an 1837

Neo-Classical red brick house he is now restoring).

Some of his advice was unexpected, such as the need to caulk window and door frames well to stop air infiltration, but not to insulate the walls. He warned that one has to re-point old brick with a mortar of lime and sand. "Old lime-based mortar was softer, like the old brick. Don't use modern mortars. They contain Portland Cement; are very strong, but expand and contract with the seasons quite differently from the old lime mortar. They will break the softer brick that was used until the 1930s." After a useful question and answer period, the meeting ended while there was still enough daylight for the audience to leave safely.

Local Hero Award to Ed Bennett, Monday June 5

The weather was sunny, inside and out, when the Canadian Urban Institute held its 2006 Urban Leadership Awards luncheon at the Royal York Hotel, Toronto. For us attending, it was Ed Bennett's Day, on which Ed received his well-deserved Local Hero Award for community service over so many years.

Jim Groulx drove Jack Hedges, Connie Lauder (Woodstock Deputy Mayor) and me to the Royal York, arriving in good time for us to attend a short reception at 11:30 a.m., during which we met up with Mary and Ed Bennett. Both of them had arrived at the Royal York the previous day.

Sitting around Ed's table a little before noon, we were joined by Jason and Jennifer Paquette, then by Susan Start, her husband and a Ms. Hutchinson (I didn't catch her first name).

Before noon, all the award winners were piped into the huge dining room, grace was said and a salad hors d'oeuvre served. At 12:15 p.m. Mary wheeled Ed Bennett up a ramp onto the speaker's platform, where he was the first of six to receive 'Local Hero' awards. Before each presentation, the reasons for the award were announced: quite impressive, in every case. Afterwards, each awardee read a brief statement of thanks.

This first set of awards was completed by 12:30. We all relaxed for a half-hour while enjoying the main course. Further Urban Leadership awards were then made: in the 'City Renewal', 'City Soul', 'City Livability', 'City Initiatives' and 'City Youth' categories. The last presentation was to Michael Harcourt (1980-86 mayor of Vancouver) of the Jane Jacobs Lifetime Achievement Award for 2006.

It was clear that all award winners were truly extraordinary men and women who really had, in different ways, made a very positive impact on the lives of those in their home communities.

Doors Open Oxford Presentation, Tuesday June 13

Doors Open Oxford volunteers were invited to a late afternoon 'thank you' event on June 13, hosted by Tourism Oxford, at Woodstock's Masonic Lodge, Finkle Street. After light refreshments, the volunteers, including members of Oxford Historical Society, attended a slide presentation in the main upper hall by Christopher Cooper, on 'Designation for Dummies'. At least, that was its original title, which he had since renamed 'Designation for Smarties'. 'Smarties', Chris explained, were owners of older heritage properties who restored rather than replaced what in their homes needed fixing. Any OxHS members present who had attended Chris Cooper's earlier May 31 Designation talk at Woodstock Museum, the evening of the hydro failure, now got to view his superb collection of architectural slides that they had missed seeing on that occasion.

Annual Outing, Stratford & St. Marys Friday June 16

The morning was bright with a light, cooling wind, as we met at the car park across from Woodstock Public Library. Jim Groulx was kind enough to give those car-less a ride in his comfortable van, and we left for Stratford by 9:30 a.m., starting north up Road 59, bordered by 'well-kept fields still showing the last freshness of spring green before the dustiness of high summer,' (to use my wife's words).

The Perth-Stratford Museum, 270 Water Street, has (since 1998) been on the second floor of what was once Stratford Normal School, built about 1908. Its collection is from the Stratford and Perth County area. The Normal school, once one of four built in Ontario, was run by some very strict principals who scared the heck out of young adults getting a standardized training as teachers (i.e., one that met approved 'norms'). At least, that's how Linda Carter, Museum Director, described Stratford Normal School, when we met her soon after 10 a.m. for a verbal overview of the Museum and its collection. (For information: <http://www.stratfordperthmuseum.ca/>)

The collection has something for most of us. Being in my second childhood, I was interested in the exhibits about

trains (and in a beautiful scale model of a steam engine). But text and pictures about the 100,000 or so 'Home Children' who, between 1869 and the 1930s, were shipped from the UK to Canada, gave me pause, especially the sad statistic that an estimated two-thirds were abused. But, in another room and a lighter moment, Ruby Bryce in our group marveled out loud at the huge collection of dolls the museum had in its section on children's toys.

Having driven on to St. Marys, we used spare time before a lunch booking to visit two candy stores in town that made their own chocolates: first Mollet's Designer Desserts, where we left our vehicles, then on to the Chocolate Factory. Afterwards, several in the group walked along eating tempting chocolate desserts. Wish I'd thought of that.

After a pleasant buffet lunch at Damen's Restaurant we walked a short way beside the Thames River to the dam north of Queen St. Bridge. Water flow over it had dropped to summer levels instead of the impressive torrent my wife and I had seen in early spring. We all circled back to our cars past an interesting stone complex that I correctly guessed was once a hotel plus adjoining livery stables. Mary Smith, curator of St Marys Museum, later confirmed this, noting that 'Garnett House' is marked on the front of the building facing the local public library.

St. Marys Museum, 177 Church St. S., was built of locally quarried limestone in 1854, by George Tracy, an early settler, as his family's home. It's been the Museum's home since 1959, and recently had an outside addition to give office and research space, plus a newly dug air-conditioned basement for the archives of both museum and town. The result is well done. A staff member, Leslie Symons, gave us an excellent guided tour of the museum. Furnishings in the house, although all donated, were of the 19th century and later, correct for the period it was a home. I was envious of the impressive new storage facilities in the basement: they will certainly allow the local archives to expand for quite some time.

In Memoriam - Dr Harold Whitfield Hedley

by Chris Packman

The stately brick house at 145 Delatre, featured on Page 1, was home for over 40 years to a past member of Oxford Historical Society, Dr Harold Hedley. He died aged 95, on May 14, in Woodstock Hospital after a period of illness. His wife for 60 years, Emmeline, died in 1999.

'A real gentleman', as several members of our Society described him. Fred Freeman, our former president, remembers fondly the phone call from Dr. Hedley in

1965, welcoming the Freeman family to Woodstock. "He wished our family a pleasant stay in the 'Friendly City' and mentioned how much his own family enjoyed living in Woodstock."

Dr. Hedley had lived in Woodstock since 1958 after his appointment as Superintendent of Schools, Woodstock. He held this position until 1969, when he became Superintendent of Schools, Oxford County, until 1974.

Long interested in local history, he was a member and on the committee of the Oxford Historical Society in the late 1960s.

Formerly, he was active in the Rotary Club; was a director of the Woodstock Strings and involved in Music Festivals.

"For the last few years, he was a member of the Probus Club and always had a kind word and welcoming smile for the members," said Fred.

A regular member of Chalmer's United Church, Dr. Hedley was a member of Sessions and a former Sunday School superintendent.

Rest in peace.

2006 Urban Leadership Awards Edwin Bennett

by Chris Packman
in cooperation with Jim Groulx

(The following is a copy of what the Oxford Historical Society sent to the Canadian Urban Institute last year to support its successful nomination of Ed Bennett for a 2006 Urban Leadership Award. On June 5, this year, Ed was presented with a Local Hero Award, at an event reported on page 4.)

Ed Bennett was well described by Keith Stevens, president of the Woodstock and District Chamber of Commerce, when he presented Ed with the President's Award in 2004, "... The gentleman we honour this evening is truly an inspiration to us all. He has participated in such a wide range of activities in Woodstock that there is scarcely a facet of the social fabric that has not been created, improved, celebrated, or saved from destruction, through his tireless efforts and dauntless vision. ...".

Background

Born in Woodstock, Ed Bennett attended local public schools and Woodstock Collegiate Institute where he excelled on high school championship football and hockey teams. On Dec 10, 1931, he was a member of the Woodstock Grads when they won the Canadian Junior Rugby Football championship by defeating the Moose Jaw Maroons, by 14-13. Decades later the Woodstock Daily Sentinel Review in its centennial issue said, "... it was probably the greatest day in Woodstock sports history".

Ed served in the Second World War with the 14th Army Regiment (Calgary Tanks), taking part in the Dieppe landing in 1942 as commander of a squadron of three Churchill tanks. Badly wounded during the Allied landing on the beach, he was captured and held as a prisoner of war for two years. In October 1944 he was repatriated to England on a P.O.W exchange of the wounded. As a result of his activities at Dieppe, he was mentioned in dispatches.

Mary Bennett, Ed's daughter, said her father eventually spoke of his life as a P.O.W., and of all the time he had to think about what really mattered to him in life: his family and his community. Making money was not important, he decided, except making enough to cover his family's

needs. The rest of his efforts should be directed to benefit his community.

Business

After demobilization, Ed worked locally with Coles Brothers Insurance agency, becoming manager before his retirement in 1979. One of his first jobs on joining Coles in 1945 was to sell \$50 Victory Loan Bonds. According to rumour, Ed even climbed on top of cars to stick posters up on lampposts. At the Victory Dinner on Nov 20, 1945, Ed Bennett received a special award for the campaign salesman who had shown the most originality, persistence and energy. These were traits that Ed would continue to display on his community's behalf for decades to come.

During his business career, Ed was for some years a director of the Woodstock & District Chamber of Commerce and a director of the Oxford County Red Cross Society.

Theatre

Ed married his late wife, Lee, in 1934. A year later, Lee helped found Woodstock Little Theatre. From 1935 and for the next several decades (except for the years of World War II), while Lee was in the spotlights as an award-winning actress in Woodstock Little Theatre amateur productions, Ed worked hard behind-the-scenes. He constructed sets, was a president of its board of directors, and raised funds from local businesses to support its productions.

Sports

Ed was an avid skier until his 80s. About 1960, he and a group of friends rented a suitable hill some 15 km NW of Woodstock, founded the volunteer Woodstock Ski Club and Ed became secretary of its board. The Club made enough profit that after five years its board members were able to buy the land they skied on.

At first, the Club had no ski tow. The enterprising Ed Bennett, hearing that a failed ski club in the U.S.A. had a rope tow for sale, managed to get a government grant for Woodstock Ski Club to buy it. At a later date, Ed repeated the exercise to get the Club used T-Bar equipment.

According to fellow skier, Roy Corbett, founder of Boys' Electric in Woodstock, "Ed was the club's best promoter, and was the driving force behind construction of a ski chalet on site". Club members raised money to buy construction materials which Ed had persuaded Hay & Co., a Woodstock construction company, to supply at a very good discount. Volunteers met on very many subsequent weekends to build the two-level chalet, 40 ft long by 20 ft wide, with Ed acting as construction supervisor and carpenter.

Both Ed and Roy arranged and administered a LIP (Local Initiatives Program) government grant to hire local unemployed men to do odd jobs around the Club and to operate the ski tow(s).

By the late 1970s, after some years of poor natural snowfall, even though the Club had its own snowmaking equipment it began to lose its volunteers and money. Too many club members moved away to areas of deeper snow and more challenging ski slopes such as at Collingwood. Eventually, the Club was sold in about 1979 to a long-time club member, John Ludington, who continued to operate it, but as a commercial venture under the name Oxford Ski Ltd.

Skiing was not the only sport that Ed supported. For many years, he was a director of the local Craigowan Golf Club, and was a chair of the Woodstock Arena Board and Recreation Commission.

Recreation – of body and spirit

From his teens, Ed was an active member of the Woodstock YMCA and, 67 years after joining, was awarded a lifetime membership. He was an organizer and founder member of the Men's Club at the 'Y', and Men's Club president in 1949-50. In the late 1950s, Ed led one of the teams that raised funds for the site purchase and construction of the present YMCA building, at 808 Dundas Street, Woodstock. It opened in June 1962.

In later years, Ed joined the Victoria Club, a reading and discussion group of 24 business people. Founded in 1921, the club still holds a twice-monthly evening meeting in a member's home to hear and discuss a paper given by one of them. Ed presented many papers during the more than 25 years of his membership.

Both Ed and his wife were generous supporters of many Woodstock cultural institutions such as the Woodstock Strings, the Art Gallery and the Public Library.

Affiliated with the Church of the Good Shepherd, Ed Bennett was also a member of the Brotherhood of Anglican Churchmen.

Heritage

As Ed neared retirement, his business activities lessened, leaving him enough free time to actively follow

up his life-long interest in local history. In 1970, he began over 30 years of volunteer work to research, promote and preserve local heritage. He attended the seminars and annual meetings of numerous heritage groups. He joined the Oxford Historical Society, becoming a member of its committee in 1971. He presented papers about local history and became a sought-after guest speaker by community and heritage groups. Ed became 1st Vice President of the Society in 1974 for four years; its President in 1977 for seven years, and has remained its Honorary President since 1989.

Under Ed's leadership, the Society had excellent monthly programs, varied bus trips to interesting places of historical interest, took an active role in local Woodstock events, and its membership soared.

Ed set up and chaired the Historic Plaques Committee: a 3-person task force that represented both the Woodstock and District Chamber of Commerce and the Oxford Historical Society. Between 1973 and 1979, the Committee was successful in putting up historic plaques at 18 locations, ranging from the First Baptist Church, founded in 1822, to the Council Chamber of the Old Town Hall, where a plaque commemorated Woodstock's Mayor Bernadette Smith, Canada's first elected woman mayor.

Ed was a director on the Oxford Museum Board from 1974 to 1980, and its Chair from 1977 to 1977. An important museum project during that time was the publication of Brian Dawe's book 'Old Oxford is Wide Awake', an early history of Oxford County. Ed helped find the money to get it published and then worked hard to promote it.

He was a charter member of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, Oxford County Branch. In 1975, he helped found the Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee (LACAC) in Woodstock, and served on it until 1979. Through LACAC's work, by 1984, 16 public and private buildings in Woodstock had been designated as historic under the Ontario Heritage Act.

Ed's enthusiasm and his success in preserving the past encouraged others to follow his example. In 1977, after the 124 year-old Oxford County Jail was closed, Oxford Council seriously considered it for demolition. This stirred members of the Oxford Historical Society to form a committee to save this oldest jail in Canada. It took several years of work, but heritage grants were eventually found. After extensive renovations, the old jail was reopened in 1986 as the offices of the Oxford Board of Health. Its elegant brick exterior, capped with a graceful Italianate tower, still marks the southern end of Woodstock's Victoria Park: an attraction for residents to be proud of, and for tourists to admire.

After finally retiring from business in 1979, Ed began his most ambitious public-service project to-date. He

organized and was co-chair of the Joe Boyle Repatriation Committee that, after three years of arduous but successful efforts (1980-1983), brought back from England the remains of a forgotten Canadian veteran and hero of the Great War, Colonel Joseph Whiteside Boyle.

Joe Boyle, who had spent his childhood in Woodstock, became a gold-rush entrepreneur in the Yukon in the late 1890s. During the 1914-18 conflict, Boyle's courageous actions in Russia were of immense help to the British and French war effort. He also helped Romania by rescuing its Treasury and crown jewels from Russian Revolutionaries, and later saved many Romanian lives.

Boyle's remains were re-buried in Woodstock and given a full military funeral with honours by the Canadian Armed Forces in mid 1983, an event attended with pride both by local citizens and by Canadian dignitaries.

In the mid 1980s, Ed appeared in, and was an advisor for, the CBC film documentary, 'Dieppe 1942'. In recent years, Ed made annual Remembrance Day presentations in local schools about the important role that Canadian veterans played in two World Wars, pointing out that many of the students had family members among them.

Awards

- Outstanding Award for Voluntary Service, presented by Lieutenant-Governor Pauline McGibbon at the Centennial Dinner of the Chamber of Commerce on Feb. 2, 1977
- Romania granted Ed Bennett its Order of Romania in 2001
- Janet Carnochan Historical Achievement Award, Ontario Historical Society Conference, June 1984
- Ontario Bicentennial Medal for Voluntary Community Service, in December 1984

- Ontario Heritage Foundation 1996 Award certificate and pin
- Woodstock District Chamber of Commerce Business 2004 Awards – President's Award of Excellence



photo by Chris Packman



photo by Chris Packman

(Postscript

Somehow overlooked when the above was first written was another received honour. During the celebration at his home on Ed's 90th birthday, one of the guests, former Mayor John Geoghegan, presented Ed with the symbolic 'Keys of the City of Woodstock'.)

The History of the Woodstock Cycling Club - Part 1

by Heather A. Rennalls

Bicycling During the 1880's and William H. Martin

In the 1880's, Woodstock was famous as one of the greatest cycling centres in North America both on an amateur and professional level.

William H. Martin, known as the "Daddy" of Woodstock's early cycling days, had numerous credentials to his name. He was a bicycle dealer, a repair shop owner, a rider and a racer. Martin was also a charter member of the old Woodstock Amateur Athletic Association (WAAA), as well as a trainer of champion bicycle riders.

In an article in *The Daily Sentinel Review* on May 3, 1919, Martin reported how, in 1879, James Hay became the first person in Woodstock to buy and ride a "high wheel bicycle" or "penny farthing."

A "high wheel bicycle" was made out of all steel and equipped with a 5/4 inch hard rubber tire. The front wheel measured 50 inches in height and the rear wheel was about 12 inches. The rider sat atop the high wheel, with handlebars close to him. The bicycle was difficult to mount as the wheels were out of proportion, often times causing the rider to do an endow - falling over the handlebars.

Martin and four of his friends decided to form a club. At a cost of \$186.00 each, five Penny Farthings were ordered from Coventry England and took six weeks to be delivered. The club "had a captain, first and second lieutenant, buglers and whippers-in. At the beginning, members all wore helmets like a policeman, tunics with brass buttons and black knickerbockers and long stockings to match".¹

Once or twice weekly, members (mostly men) would provide noontime parades and club runs that went to Ingersoll or Tavistock and back. It was a common sight to see sixty to one hundred riders out on these club runs. The captain would give a signal to the buglers to form either a single file or double up in threes or fours. It is reported that in one day, riders rode their high wheelers from Goderich to Woodstock.

Members Sergeant McKay, Herb Clark, Alf Pilkey, Jim Eagan, W. Merritt, and Martin himself purchased lighter bicycles for racing. Since they had no track to train on, they rode their bicycles on the sidewalks, which were made of planks laid cross-wide and stretched from the Presbyterian Cemetery on Vansittart Avenue to the Old North American Hotel on the corner of Dundas Street.

Horses now had two elements to frighten them – automobiles and bicycles!

In 1884, after he left the post office, Martin became a charter member of the WAAA. As manager, he was in charge of the bowling alleys, billiard rooms, and cigar stand. Not only had he become a noted racer, he was also a trainer for some of Woodstock's champion riders like Herbert Clark, A. E. Pilkey and Bill Carman, to name just a few.

Around 1888, Martin left the WAAA to open a bicycle and repair shop, located immediately behind the Royal Bank, off Dundas and Finkle, which operated until 1918 after he retired. In that same year, the shop was operated by the late Jack Chipperfield and moved to Light Street, behind Frank Hyde's drug store. The bicycle shop was still called "Martin's Repair Shop": Chipperfield had been Martin's chief mechanic for many years. The shop continued until Jack's death in the fall of 1944.

In 1945, eighty-one year old William H. Martin died at Victoria Hospital in London. Prior to his death, failing health saw him confined to Woodstock General Hospital for two-and-a-half years. He never married and was predeceased by two sisters. For over fifty years, Martin was prominently identified with the business and bicycle community of Woodstock.

The Woodstock Amateur Athletic Association (WAAA)

The Woodstock Amateur Athletic Association (WAAA) was created in 1883, after an amateur lacrosse club called *Beaver* joined with local amateur baseball and bicycle clubs to form a local multi-sport regulatory agency. (In that same year, the Canadian Wheelmen's Association of Canada, CWA, was also established.)

The WAAA encouraged and regulated "all amateur athletics in the town and [created] a community-based organization to provide sporting and social entertainment for the town's two big civic holiday celebrations, Queen Victoria's birthday, May 24th and Dominion Day, July 1st".²

In 1889, Ingersoll formed its own Amateur Athletic Association (IAAA) but the Woodstock association was ranked with Montreal as one of the two earliest amateur athletic associations in Canada.

[to be continued in next issue – 2006 October]

¹Martin, W. H. "History of Woodstock's Early Bicycling Days", *The Daily Sentinel Review* (Saturday May 3, 1919), p. 10.

²Boucher, Nancy. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*. Volume 10, August 1993, No. 2, p. 172.

News of Members

Jack Hedges wins Quarter Century Club Award for Community Service



photo by Chris Packman

Jack Hedges made a large donation to the Oxford Historical Society, and brought this along to the society's May committee meeting to prove it.

In the late 70 and early 80's, he spent countless hours volunteering for Woodstock's Big Brothers organization. Some years after, the National Big Brothers and Big Sisters asked Jack to help as an "agency reviewer". This huge task involved reviewing the case files, minutes, financial statements – and conducting extensive interviews with clients, parents, staff, Board members and other community agencies.

The Quarter Century Club is a non-profit corporation to help long-term employees and retirees of the Ontario Public Service. The QCC also makes an annual award to members who have of especial service as volunteers within their communities.

Thanks to the research and effective nomination efforts of Fred Freeman, helped by Jack's family, Jack was one of four who received a 2006 QCC Honours Award for Community Service. Presentations were made at the George Brown House, Toronto, on May 11. Jack's award included a \$1000 cheque made out to a name of his choice – the Oxford Historical Society.

Details of Jack's nomination paper are on the Web at <http://www.qcclub.gov.on.ca/qccprogramme.html>. A highly abridged version of this follows:

Interested in history, and with a history degree from the Univ. of Western Ontario, Jack joined the Oxford Historical Society in 1978. Soon after, Jack served on its Board, first as Vice President, then President and then, for many years, as Treasurer.

A member of the Oxford Chapter of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, Jack's presentations on residential architecture and County churches have been seen widely.

For a decade, Jack traveled throughout Canada performing agency reviews to ensure local compliance with national standards. During his years with the Ministry of Community and Social Services he used his vacation time to meet with agencies that required review.

Until very recently Jack was a member of the Board of Directors of Oxford County's Maplewood Counseling Inc., and was central in the organizational review of the agency.

Jack Hedges was a founding member of the Elgin Oxford Legal Clinic in 2001 that provides free legal services to low income and disabled residents of the two counties. Jack continues to spend an enormous amount of time as a volunteer; as Treasurer of the Clinic and, for two past years, in the Quality Assurance Office Advisory Committee. Jack's abilities in this area were acknowledged during the year he served on the Executive of the Association of Legal Clinics of Ontario.

In support of Jack Hedges' nomination for the QCC Honours Awards for Community Service, the Executive Director of one of the agencies at which Jack volunteers wrote "He always made himself available for additional work... he cheerfully gives of his time on behalf of those in need in this area, and for that he deserves our appreciation and our thanks".