



Huron County Historical Society

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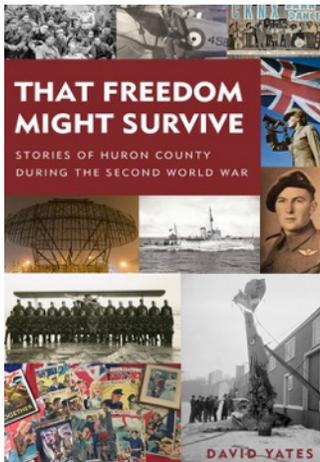
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Book Review

That Freedom Might Survive

Author David Yates
 Reviewed By Graham Booth



They were the best of times. They were the worst of times. These were the sentiments so often shared by those who lived through the harrowing years of World War Two.

And yet, many of those same individuals have said in the ensuing years, that it was one of the most exciting times of their lives, formative years that have led historians to refer them

as the Greatest Generation. Author David Yates prefaces his new book, ***That Freedom Might Survive***, with that quote from renowned broadcaster Tom Brokaw to set the stage for the story that would unfold in his retelling of everyday life during those war years.

In this third book in his trilogy of works on the history of Huron County, Yates takes the reader on a journey of understanding how life went on during these tumultuous times and where courage, resilience and sacrifice gave character to those lives and shaped their values in the generations to come.

His narrative of those years begins with the aftermath of the Great War where the Depression had led many to challenge their beliefs, leading some elements of society to embrace socialism, an idealistic response born out of severe economic deprivation, and the crippling toll on families and misery dealt to society in the Dirty Thirties.

This abhorrence of facing another war would be shattered by events unfolding in fascist Europe in the late 1930s. With these challenges to democratic ideals abroad, some local patriots heeded the call to fight for freedom by volunteering for battle in the ill-fated Spanish Civil War.

And yet at the outset of WWII, Yates demonstrates how life went on in Huron County, as it always has, like many rural areas of Ontario – country fairs, days at the beach, family get togethers, taking one's date to the movie theatres like the

February 2021 Newsletter

New Format For Getting Together

I don't know if it has occurred to many that normally, remember those times, the Historical Society suspended meetings during the winter months for the obvious reasons. But with new technology we were able to listen to two wonderful speakers from the comfort of our homes. We are planning for our on site meetings with the following line up (COVID permitting of course)

May 22 Kildonen House, Clinton with a dinner and tour/presentation
 June 19 Carlow, dinner meeting at Masonic Hall and tour/presentation of store

AND don't be left out of anything historical happening in Huron and beyond. Yes we are on FACEBOOK and both your executive and fellow members have been posting some interesting items.

Renewing and new Memberships may be easily paid by e-transfer. Contact us at hchs1965@gmail.com to arrange.

Reflections: The Life and Works Of J.W. (Jack) McLaren

This wonderful show will be finishing April 30, 2021. Good news - the Huron County Museum is opening up to the public again and you now have a chance to see it and for some of us a chance to see it again. Phone the Museum to book your viewing. 519-524-2686

Correction

How many of our historians caught our error in the article on the Huron Tract Land Trust Conservancy? We were not rewriting history in last month's newsletter when we wrote that the Canada Company was an agent of the British government. Robert Lee, who literally wrote the book on the Huron Tract (**The Canada Company and Huron Tract 1826-1895**) sets the records straight with the following:

The Canada Company, incorporated by an Act of Parliament in 1826, was set up to purchase land (see Appendix A, page 216, of my book): 1824 Canada Company founded in London, England, with Provisional Committee created to run it until charter granted. Capital set at £1,000,000 sterling (10,000 shares at par value of £100 each). Shareholders are assessed an initial £5.

1825: Crown purchases land in part covered by the Huron Tract from the Chippewa First Nation for £1,100 -- to be paid annually.

1826: Canada Company obtains charter (August 19) and reaches agreement to purchase 1,000,000 acres in Huron Tract in lieu of Clergy Reserves (829,430 acres) plus Crown Reserves of 1,348,413 acres and 42,000 acres Halton Block at a cost per acre of 3s/2d sterling or 3s/6d currency. John Galt was the first commissioner.

Rhea Hamilton Seeger
 Newsletter Editor

Roxy in Clinton and dancing at the lakeside pavilions. The author, whose family, like many of those around Huron County, were leading normal lives even as the ominous storm clouds of wars began to unfold in local news coverage on the eve of conflict.

When Huron County was faced with the challenge to take up arms it rallied quickly to the call as the tranquility of life abruptly halted and was transformed with the building of four air training bases in Port Albert, Goderich, Centralia and Clinton. We see how the local citizenry watched in awe, and witnessed, in a matter of months, Huron County with becoming the leading centre of aviation training for the Commonwealth. All of our industrial might would soon be brought to bare, marshaled the likes of war production czar, Sir Ernest Cooper from Clinton.

Yates captures the excitement and challenges for the local population. He demonstrates through archived personal accounts the tremendous upheaval but also heart felt response to take up the call to serve the nation.

He portrays how the local towns became hosts to thousands of air trainees, from feeding and clothing them, to providing entertainment at centres we still recognize today such as the Mackay Hall and fond memories of the popular CKNX Barn Dance in Wingham that enthralled air force audiences and even enforcers, laying down the law when there were street brawls with over exuberant young servicemen.

We also learn of the toll paid by some of those airmen, who made the ultimate sacrifice with their lives in training and overseas in battle and how everyone rose to the occasion with signs of compassion.

We read touching accounts of how some townfolk welcomed in flyers for holiday events or made them feel at home by staging local dances and banquet events.

Many of the trainees would leave their mark through bravery and heroic accomplishments. They would play a pivotal role on the front lines of battle once they had been flown to Europe by Ferry Command, based in Montreal, along with the new fighters and bombers they would be leading into combat.

Some of these newly trained flyers would be part of legendary events such as the Battle of Britain, dam busting and the D-Day invasion. We also are told of the fame that some of these airmen are remembered for, their personas even being immortalized in Hollywood movies such as *The Dam Busters* and *The Great Escape*, where their exploits were portrayed on screen or where they served as movie consultants in their production. And yet, sadly, their moments of heroism were often bitter sweet, cut short when they heeded the call to return to combat, such as dam buster Wing Commander Guy Gibson. Too often, young lives were lost when so much promise awaited them after the war.

On the home front Yates reveals how there were also local heroes who risked their lives in search and rescue operations for downed air trainees often in the worst of conditions. Every day, recovery personnel were ready to meet that call to save others.

Similarly, the vitally important provisioning side of the war effort had to work tirelessly to feed a beleaguered Europe on the verge of collapse. We learn of local dairies, cheese factories and graineries operating non stop to fend off starvation abroad. These are the legions of unsung heroes that were essential to help carry us through to victory.

Some local citizens would also become leading men and women in the war effort, who in certain instances would be bestowed with the highest honours for their contributions. It would also see the emergence of women in the air industry at a time when gender inequality was rampant in our society. Colonel Alice Sorby, Deputy Commander of the Canadian Women's Army Corps, stands

out as one of the truly remarkable women of distinction during the War, who blazed a career path for future generations of women in the armed forces and was awarded for her services as a Member of the Order of the British Empire by King George VI.

We learn that for some of those were honoured for their distinction during the war they would turn their leadership skills into successful careers in civilian life.

Air Vice Marshall John A. Sully would earn distinction during both World Wars, at home and abroad for his dynamic leadership skills as a guiding force in creating the Canadian air force and then turning his many enterprising talents to a successful career as the head of Dominion Road Machinery then Champion Graders.

The author's own grandfather, too, would also be amongst those ranks, serving with distinction in the Royal Canadian Navy, and who experienced first hand combat in the crucial Battle of The Atlantic for supremacy of the high seas as the life line to Europe.

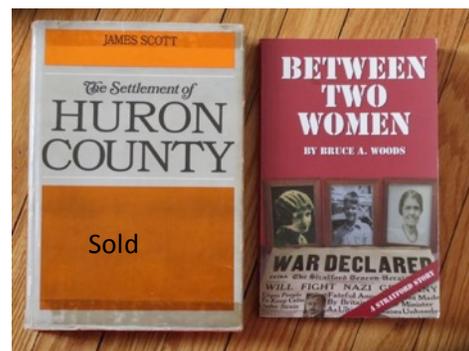
As the tide of battle gradually tilted in favour of the Allies the war effort at home began to wind down. We read how bases were closed down, with thousand of airmen saying their final good byes. Many relationships were at their crossroads. Some would part, never to be see each other again and while others would become part of the huge ground swell of repatriation on the home front including the flood of War Brides who now called Canada home, one of whom would be this reviewer's aunt who left behind her native Holland for a new life with my uncle.

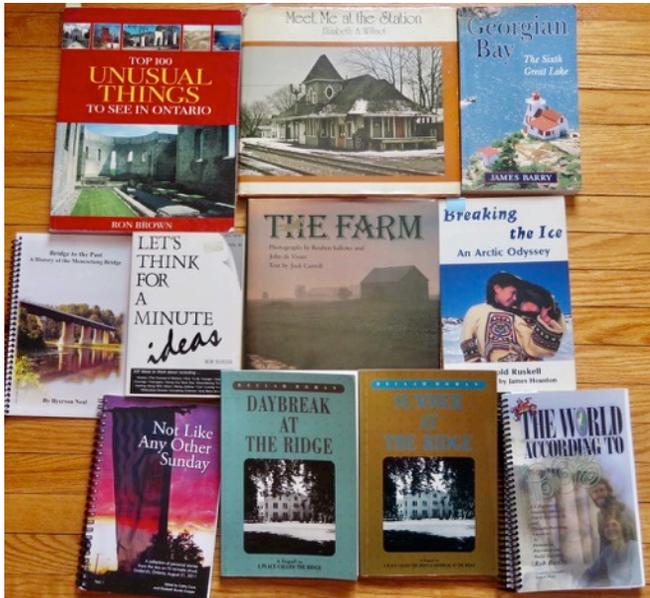
As a fitting tribute to honour all of those made the ultimate sacrifice during the War, the author concludes this tribute by recounting his pilgrimage trip in 2019 to the war memorials in Europe. Accompanied by some of his Huron County students they paid their respects to those fallen heroes. The trip impressed upon this next generation why the price of freedom is so dear to our democracy.

This book is a remarkable account of how the people of Huron County rose to the challenges of World War II. We witness how the normality of everyday life was transformed overnight. How each civilian shouldered responsibility to do their part and carry this burden for the war effort, in a manner no one could have foreseen. And we see how it left an indelible mark on society to this day. Through this memorable account the author gives the reader assurance that the people of Huron County can take pride in knowing it was their finest hour.

Generous Fundraiser Continues For Huron County Historical Society

We have been offered some more books to sell with proceeds to the Huron County Historical Society. Bonnie Sitter is generously looking after this project, with delivery terms and collection. She can be reached via email bonnie.sitter@gmail.com Make an offer!





Where to get your local History Books

And back copies of The Historical Notes – Finchers and The Book Peddler both of Goderich, North Huron Citizen in Blyth, The Book Barn off Hwy 86 between Wingham and Whitechurch, The Village Bookshop, Bayfield and Bayfield Archives.

Membership renewal....

If you received this newsletter by mail, the date shown above your name on the address label is the year to which your membership is paid up, according to our records. Call Elaine Snell if you are not sure or need clarification. If you are in arrears, consider this a reminder that the membership fees are \$20. To reserve your member's hard copy of Historical Notes, keep your dues up to date. Copies of recent past Historical Notes are available from Elaine Snell at 519-523-9531 (past copies \$8.00 per copy).

To access the members-only section for the Historical Notes or to do a search for names or places in the Historical Notes, go to

www.HuronCountyHistoricalSociety.ca, open the dropdown menu for Publications, click HCHS Members Login. If you cannot get access using the password, then check if your web browser is up to date.

If the password is lost or not available readily, contact hchs1965@gmail.com or call 519-440-6206