



Huron County Historical Society

PO Box 3, Goderich ON, N7A 3Y5
519-440-6206 email: hchs1965@gmail.com
www.HuronCountyHistoricalSociety.ca

Executive for 2020-2021

Vacant	President		Ralph Laviolette	Secretary-treasurer
Vicky Culbert	Past- president	226-421-2295	Mac Campbell	Director
Elaine Snell	Membership	519-523-9531	James White	Director
Mary Gregg	Director		Susan Glousher	Director
Rhea Hamilton- Seeger	Director	519-612-1201	Larry Mohring	Director

December 2020 Newsletter

Speakers' Series for 2021

*Moments in Time: The Life and Times
of R. R. Sallows, Photographer*
with Colleen McGuire

January 14th at 7 pm

Please email hchs1965@gmail.com
to register and receive meeting links

New - Speaker Series for Winter Program

We have an exciting winter program set up. Yes we are operating in this quiet season with the help of technology that keeps us safely at home and engaged.

Our first speaker is **Colleen Maguire**, a Goderich historian who specializes in unique ways to impart history. Every summer, you will find her at the Huron County Gaol, in period costume, portraying the Gaol Governess, Mrs. Margaret Dickson, a role she has held for the past six years. In the winter of 2017 – 2018, she transcribed, researched and annotated Gaoler William Dickson's journal, covering 1866 – 1872, for the Huron County Museum.

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.

Colleen has been a Reuben R. Sallows Gallery board member since 2013 but was a financial founder of the Gallery at its inception back in 2001. As secretary on the *Great Lakes Storm of 1913: A Remembrance Committee*, she was a recipient of the Governor General's History Award for Community Programming. In 2018, she was awarded the Huron Arts and Heritage Network's Heritage Award to an Individual. Colleen received her diploma in Applied Arts Photography from Fanshawe College in 1983 and owned a photography studio in Goderich. Thus, she has researched the life of Reuben Sallows from the perspective of both a photographer and historian. She is also an antique camera collector and has curated a vintage camera exhibit for the Sallows Gallery.

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, or at the Museum (past copies \$8.00 per copy).

What is on your winter reading list...

We are fortunate in Huron to have a number of writers who keep us enthralled with the history of Huron. David Yates has released his third book in as many years. Graham Booth submitted a review of David's second book, *Out Of The Blue*, that we are sharing with you. It focuses on life and characters in Huron between 1884 and 1939.

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.

Shawn Henshall has published a wonderful expose on Jack McLaren that coincides with the exhibit of Jack's work at the Huron County Museum. It runs until April 2021. Our own James White was quick off the mark and has offered a review of The Forgotten Legend: The Life Story of John Wilson McLaren.

Rhea Hamilton Seeger
Newsletter Editor

Out of The Blue

By David Yates

Book Review by Graham Booth

Author David Yates, a dedicated and much respected local writer has demonstrated, once again, a mastery for weaving together the life-stories of some many people and events that have shaped the history of Huron County.

These skills are again evident in his latest book, **Out of the Blue**, the second of what he expects to be a trilogy of History throughout the ages in Huron County. His first offering in this series, **Out of The Woods**, chronicled the early settlement period in the County up until 1883. This latest work spans the period from 1884 to 1939.

As with the first book, Yates sets the tone for what the reader can expect when he recites from a passage in the Acknowledgments that “the past is a foreign country, they do things differently there” meaning it is not going to be an ordinary retelling of historical tales but a lively and highly entertaining journey through true life stories without the veneer of traditional retelling found in many history books.

This eclectic collection of stories gleaned from 12 years of newspaper accounts is vividly brought to life, some even obscure yet tantalizing tales that both fascinate and intrigue the reader as each short segment touches on stories which many of us could well relate to in current times.

These snapshots from that formative 55-year period show a Huron County coming into its own with all the challenges of a changing world around it. Yates has a knack for tackling subjects that capture one’s imagination in such a way that the reader can get up close to who these characters were, the often startling lives they led and their lasting imprints on who we are today.

And to his credit, Yates, leaves no stone unturned in digging through the annals of real life events. Many of the subjects pull at our heart-strings, evoke a sense of pride and accomplishment, celebrate valour, cringe at crimes and misdemeanors, and expose taboos shocking to values of that those times.

Yates chronicles how exciting an era this was for scientific breakthroughs and technological advancements, championed by certain individuals from Huron County who emerged to play leading roles in these achievements. In some cases, their accomplishments brought national and even international acclaim with lasting impact to this day.

We learn of individuals such as Lystra Eggert Gretter who revolutionized nursing health care, of Charles Trick Currelly, founder of the Royal Ontario Museum, Dr. Charlotte Whitehead Ross, one of Canada’s first female doctors and a pioneer as an frontier physician, of John Rainsford Bone who would prove be a pivotal mentor for the world-famed author, Ernest Hemingway, of Annie Caroline Macdonald who blazed international trails for the YWCA, of Sir John Cunningham McLennan, an acknowledged leader of science in Canada instrumental in the formation the National Research Council of Canada and of Reuben Sallows, a ground-breaking photographer whose genius would vault his works to world-wide exposure.

The author also portrays the compassion and out-pouring of goodwill displayed by the people of Huron County either in celebration of great events or in empathy for those suffering and in

need. Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee in 1897, Huron County peace celebrations in 1919 and the Royal Tour of the King and Queen in 1939 showed the patriotic good will and gratitude for our institutions. And when tragedy struck, such as in the Great Storm of 1913, the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1919 and the Great Depression relief trains sponsorship, the people of Huron County are shown to rise to the occasion with their life saving deeds.

Yates similarly brings to light lifestyles of the times when Huron County experienced the heyday of lakeside resorts, passage on cruise liners, and hosted much anticipated annual cultural and learning events such as Chautauqua. He reveals rare glimpses of every day life and bigger than life figures that add colour and a human touch that mirrors the times.

Even events that show the less wholesome side of life in Huron County are revealed as when the Ku Klux Klan came to the area, the harsh enforcement of principles of law of that era when offenders were brought to justice for crimes that often shocked and dismayed the public at that time, or the misguided Home Child settlement program that ushered in significant social reform such as to the treatment of disadvantaged minors or those with impairments.

There are endless tales to be told in this riveting book, full of stories that are bound to capture the interest and imagination of many readers and bring to life a fascinating era in the history of Huron County.

The Forgotten Legend: The Life Story of John Wilson McLaren

By Shawn Henshall

Book Review by James White

Shawn Henshall has written an intriguing and delicious biography of Jack McLaren. It reads like a thriller – a genuine page turner – that I found difficult to put down, even for meals or other interruptions. It is an accurate reflection of Jack’s rollicking life; accomplished artist, author, actor and entertainer – a true Renaissance Man. But, as Henshall astutely observes: “someone who had accomplished so much and yet received so little recognition.”

Henshall’s story begins with Jack’s birth in Edinburgh, where he went to school until his father’s death at 39, when the family moved to his mother’s homeland, Canada. Two high school years later he returned to study at the Edinburgh College of Art. After graduating in 1914 he returned to Toronto where he made for the army recruiting center and, after a bout of hepatitis, began training as a soldier. Henshall describes his continuing artistic career while serving in France with the PPLI (Princess Patricia’s Light Infantry), providing illustrations of pencil sketches of life in the trenches and paintings of devastated cities.

He became a sniper in the trenches. But his third career began when he started writing skits, poking fun at aspects of army life and performing them for off-duty men. He became the organizer of the PPLI Comedy Troupe and its chief actor/entertainer and writer; Jack became a man of many parts. Henshall describes how the burgeoning company reached a wider audience through the impact they had on senior officers. One regiment commander made them full time “soldiers of song”. He arranged for them to perform for the battalion and eventually for others.

Shawn weaves several Jack stories into his account. One in particular had me giggling: after one of the shows featuring the chorus 'girls' a private came backstage carrying flowers for the one who had caught his fancy. McLaren met him straightfaced, assured him that she had already left and inviting him back the following evening. He knew the company would be moving on!

When the war ended, Henshall described the amalgamation of members of the thirty entertainment groups into a professional group, *The Dumbells*, who toured Canada and then landed a gig in New York. They were wildly popular and Hollywood came calling on Jack in the person of a baby-faced producer named Irving Thalberg. Jack agreed to an audition but never kept the appointment, thinking this youth was an office boy of "around fourteen". (He was twenty-one.) Thalberg went on to produce such blockbusters as **Mutiny on the Bounty** and discovered Clark Gable and Joan Crawford! Oh, Jack!

Another favorite occurred some years later when McLaren was drumming up business from General Motors for his agency. Never one to start small, McLaren went to see the head man, Sam McLaughlin. His secretary sent him away since he had no appointment so Jack went to a hotel nearby, phoned and was greeted by Sam himself. "Come right away" was the reply. They got on like a house on fire. On subsequent visits Jack was chauffeured home with Sam for lunch. One time the regular invite came but Sam's car was out of action so Jack offered to drive. A horrible thought struck him as they walked to the parking lot: his car was a Ford coupe! Various snide remarks from Sam ensued which finished with: "This contraption has shaken me up so much I have no need of my regular massage."

Henshall tells us that Jack and Lillian, growing increasingly exasperated by the traffic and the congestion of Toronto made several trips to Huron County where they visited friends in Bayfield. Appreciating the beauty and tranquility they bought a property on the banks of the Maitland at Benmillar. Soon Jack was painting some of his most beautiful work in the studio he had constructed as part of renovating their new home. They lived here for the last years of their lives. Over those twenty-six years, Jack continued to reinvent himself. He wrote the lyrics and designed the decor for a musical – *Stereoscope 67* – and he wrote articles for **Macleans** and various other publications in Canada and abroad. While Henshall never uses the term, I believe Jack was a quiet genius. Brush, pen, voice and mind coalesced beautifully. And Shawn Henshall has spent over ten years and one thousand hours of painstaking research to prove it. As he sums up: "Jack McLaren had it all, he was bold, brilliant, daring, brave and passionate in every task he undertook."