



# Huron County Historical Society

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Executive for 2019-2020

Vicky Culbert	President	226-421-2295	Ralph Laviolette	Secretary-treasurer
Rhea Hamilton-Seeger	Past- president	519-529-7238	Mac Campbell	Director
Elaine Snell	Membership	519-523-9531	Larry Mohring	Director
Graham Booth	Director		James White	Director
Mary Gregg	Director		Susan Gloucher	Director

June 2020

Next Society Meeting ....

Something more to think about. We are launching a new idea to our membership.

Each year we award special recognition to a local historian. We would like to expand the criteria and create a roster of **Historians of Distinction**.

Suggestions are welcome and next month we will introduce you to the first one.

Our COVID 19 Calendar

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

Both the Huron County Museum and the Huron County Historical Society are committed to following through with this exhibit.

Once our world gets back to 'normal' a new time will be chosen and the show will go on!!!!

Thank you for your patience, your willingness to share, and most importantly your generosity of spirit.

Trek to Bruce & Grey Bus Tour Rescheduled for October

We are still hoping to make this bus tour happen and we are hopeful with more and more businesses opening up is a good sign for us.

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HCHS Annual General Meeting

In view of COVID and the probability of not getting a quorum on a Zoom-organized meeting, the Board agreed that the AGM be postponed until an in-person meeting can be scheduled.

## We Are Challenged To Respond to How This Time Of COVID Is Affecting Us For Future Historians

We have a quick update from the Huron County Museum and Historic Gaol. While they don't have a date for reopening, their Collections staff are back at work on a few projects with all the necessary precautions.

We can contribute to a wonderful project called *Collecting Memories: COVID-19*. A partnership with a local school brought in a variety of letters from students recently. Take up the challenge to select one of the prompts from their website and submit something to the growing collection.

<https://www.huroncountymuseum.ca/collecting-memories-covid-19/>

We are continuing with our book reviews with James White on

**FOR THE LOVE OF BAYFIELD – the events and special people who shaped this village by David Gillians**

The word "love" in the title of this book is appropriate for a number of reasons. First, the author's approach and his style leads us, his readers, to a love of Bayfield. It is clear that David Gillians himself is a lover of his home town; he displays such obvious enthusiasm for its history and those who lived it. The work is full of careful research, clear photographs and fascinating stories and interviews with those who share his enthusiasm. The many hours of volunteer labour put in by residents and summer visitors alike reveals how the community has been shaped and moulded by love in action. The cover features a beautiful painting by Bruce Stapleton which captures so well the essential elements of Bayfield: trees, cottages and boats reflected in the wide expanse of the river mouth. That vista entices the reader into exploring the contents.

The author traces the history of Bayfield from the time of the 350 million year old fossils (which are still found on the beach after storms on Lake Huron) all the way to 2018 with the fundraising and purchase of land on the River Flats for a public park. David Gillians has a flair for making history riveting. Events and dates are enlivened by the very human stories of the protagonists. His use of one-line headlines above each account adds to the readability of his descriptions. O that the history textbooks I endured at school were as enticing!

One story the author relates focusses on Bayfield's first physician, Dr Ninian Mahaffey Woods. Driven from Ireland by the troubles, he arrived with his wife and two infant children in 1851. From the start he acted like the squire of the infant village. The harbor and the roads were a mess. His energy led to significant changes. During his tenure Bayfield evolved from its days as a pioneer settlement. The harbor was

transformed, roads and rail connections were established and substantial houses (including two of his own) were built. The squire's family crest incorporated an apt motto: "Patience Conquers All." The development of Bayfield continued after his death in 1884. Two of his descendants became Reeves after the village became incorporated. Its population at the time (1876) was 840; when the squire arrived 25 years earlier it was 125. Gilliam's photographs of the members of the family and their various homes are stunning!

I found the story of the intoxicated pigs a hoot! Many villagers kept animals on their properties in the early days. Johann Gemeinhardt was proud of his orchard and would make hard cider and schnapps in the fall from his crop of apples and pears. The fermented pulp was piled high in his garden as mulch. One day, a neighbour's pigs got loose, feasted on the pile and drunkenly rampaged through the village gardens and caused consternation in church by joining in the hymns with delighted squeals!

Life in Bayfield has been shaped by numerous individuals. Before Bombardier came out with the snowmobile, a Bayfield inventor, Walter Westlake, developed what he called an "auto-sled." He fitted the chassis of a car with caterpillar tracks at the rear and skis at the front. The village mailman, who inherited the vehicle, put a box on the back to protect mail as he delivered it around the village. Walter then invented a mobile power saw to chop blocks of ice from the river in February to be stored in an ice house on the shore and delivered to customers for summer use. The operator had to wear spikes on his boots to prevent the machine running away with him!

Bayfield and boats have long been synonymous. Gillians states that distinctive Huron schooners have been built on the flats beside the river since 1854. The most prominent boat builder was Hugh MacLeod, a fisherman who was active from 1860 to 1910. His last sail craft was named for his daughter who died in infancy – Helen Macleod. After he died his sons, Louie and Jack, used the original molds and plans to build a replica of the derelict original – Helen Macleod 2. Launched in 1926, she was the last sail driven schooner on the lake. Although she had an auxiliary gas engine, Captain Louie never used it if he had sufficient wind to sail! Many sailors owed their lives to his skill, for he would set out to rescue storm stricken vessels in the most severe weather. The author tells us that the Helen MacLeod is now back near Bayfield after a stint in the United States under a different name. She is gradually being restored by volunteers connected with the Bayfield Historical Society who now own her. Exciting!

More recent developments described in the book are the building of an all-metal fishing tug - the Maymac – in 1975 and the enterprise of three other boat builders who started the Bayfield Boat Yard in 1971. The Maymac was an original design, 50 feet in length and built on the river flats by six local craftsmen – the Captain/designer, a welder, 2 engine mechanics, a carpenter and a painter. Bayfield built from stem to stern! The three sailboat builders started with a 23 foot fiberglass sloop – the Bayfield 23. The design was very similar to the Helen Macleod, with a swooping crescent-shaped bow and sleek lines. Over the years the threesome branched out to build Bayfields 25, 29, 32 and 36. The company became one of the largest boat builders in Canada, employing 65 people and turning out 200 sailboats a year. After a disastrous fire and retrenchment in the market for sailboats, it closed in 1988.

More stories of individual entrepreneurs feature in the book – a renowned wagon builder, a croquet expert and a windmill maker. However the author also focusses on groups such as the Lions and the Optimists who realized that working together was essential to Bayfield providing for the social and economic needs of its citizens. Governments or agencies would not simply provide childrens programmes, Meals on Wheels, or shut-ins services. "Do it ourselves" was the watchword. At the end of the book David Gillians asks the question: "What is it that makes Bayfield so special?" The answers he lists are, first of all: dedicated volunteers, ingenuity in discovering community needs, the development of organizations and, finally, astute marketing of Bayfield as a holiday destination. I would come back to his title and add to his list: "the love of Bayfield". I loved reading this book as I am sure readers will. I now have the urge to discover more of Bayfield and learn to love the place as much as David Gillians does.

**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 and The Village Bookshop in Bayfield**

### *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).*

*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](http://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](mailto:hchs1965@gmail.com) or call 519-440-6206.*