

HERITAGE CORNER

200 YEARS IN THE MAKING: Corunna was *Almost Canada's Capital!*

Heritage St. Clair breaking news: From the dusty halls of history to 2023, we bring you a story that will amaze and amuse you. Did you know that Corunna was once chosen to be Canada's new capital city? Read on...

...In 1823, Lord William Carr Beresford of England and his survey party arrived in awe of a mighty forest on the eastern shore of the St. Clair River, to survey a suitable location for the Capital of Canada. Beresford named this site Corunna to commemorate the Napoleonic battle of La Coruña, a seaport in northwestern Spain, where his commanding officer Sir John Moore met his demise. From the 1823 survey, the streets were laid out in a pattern similar to that of the British flag, the Union Jack. The British army officers under the command of Sir John Moore provided the names for Corunna's streets. Hill and Lyndoch Streets were to be the main thoroughfares of Canada's capital, which accounts for their extra width, still seen today. The diagonal street design from the 1823 survey converged in the centre of a ten acre open area which was named St. George's Square, in honor of the Patron Saint of England. This is where the government buildings of the United Provinces of Upper Canada (now Ontario) and Lower Canada (now Quebec) would have been built. Corunna was surveyed again in 1836. The diagonal design from the 1823 and the 1836 surveys were rejected, so another survey was ordered for 1837. The area was then designed in the style of the current town layout, a square street pattern. Building lots were then put up for sale and settlement of the town began. The village boasted two shoemakers, two harness-makers, three blacksmiths, one cabinet maker, a tin smith, a grist mill, a ship builder, and two general stores. Five hotels were also built along with two on Stag Island. In 1852 the post office was established. Since marine shipping was the main mode of transportation at the time, many docks were built to handle exports of timber, grain and potash. A railway, the Erie and Huron railway, now known as CSX, was built passing through Corunna in 1886. This railway linked Corunna with Lake Huron, Sarnia and as far south as Lake Erie,

greatly adding to Corunna's prosperity. Sadly, the proposal of Corunna as the Canada's capital was rejected, along with Toronto (York) and Kingston, because of its close proximity to the United States. However, Corunna has now become a thriving community that people continue to call home.

This year, Corunna will celebrate 200 years since Corunna was "capital of Canada" for a couple of days. A special committee has been formed to discuss ways to commemorate this brush with greatness. So far, a special logo is being designed and banners bearing that design will be posted on 36 Lyndoch Street streetlight poles to raise public awareness. A family-friendly community event plus associated activities and commemo-



The Corunna 200 Committee holds its inaugural meeting to figure out how to celebrate Corunna's near-miss to be capital of Canada. From left to right around the table: Chairman Tracy Kingston; Nicole Smith; Steve Pilke; Melissa Atyeo; Myka Barnes; Dean Esser; Ashley Ward-Robbins; Randi Rogers.

Can you reunite this adorable pair of dolls?

The Moore Museum is searching for *Bonnie*, the adorable little dolly in this picture. She's shown here with her brother, *Ronnie*, in the happy days before she went missing.

The museum would like to reunite the twins so they can be included in the museum's toy shop display.

The dollies are made from molded plastic rubber and were originally sold in pairs by the Viceroy Manufacturing Company of Toronto. The company factory on Dupont Street began producing the molded rubber toys, which were known for their bright colours, in 1930. In addition to dolls, the product line included: bath toys, balls, sand and beach toys, small cars and trucks.

If you have a *Bonnie* doll, or if you know someone who has, please reunite the twins by emailing: lwoods@stclairtownship.ca



Riverside Cemetery Board Annual Meeting

The Riverside Cemetery Board Annual Meeting will be held on Wednesday, Feb. 8 at 10 a.m. at Nautical Hills (formerly Pick & Pay Variety). Lot holders and interested parties are encouraged to attend. For more information, please contact Dennis Robinson at 519-892-3316.

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A Family Day throw-back to days gone through portraits

Moore Museum Curator Fiona Doherty

Monday, February 20th is Family Day. As a newer holiday, first observed in Ontario in 2008, there are few traditions associated with Family Day; however, the tradition of taking family portraits is one that has been increasingly popular for hundreds of years.

Before the invention of photography, having a family portrait meant sitting to have one painted, an expensive and lengthy process that was out of reach for most people. Working class families might have had a silhouette of their profile cut out of black paper and mounted instead; while those slightly more fortunate might have been able to acquire a miniature of watercolours. Only the rich were able to commission their portraits in oils. Fortunately, this changed in the early 19th century. The first known photograph was taken by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, a French inventor, in the late 1820's. The next several decades would see the development of the process of photography, from expensive and time consuming to more affordable and accessible to the average family.

The popularity of family portraits is sometimes attributed to Queen Victoria, who was passionate about photography and used it to document her life and family. The public, often looking to mimic the practices of the royal family, also embraced photography and sat for family portraits, which soon became not only a way to immortalize the family group, but also a symbol of status. As such, these pictures were taken to portray an idealized version of the sitter. Everything from the pose of the subject, their gaze and dress, accessories held or displayed around them, the painted backdrop and even the event prompting the photograph to be taken, were all carefully chosen to ensure that the portrait would reveal the subject's best features.

Although hard to believe now given the frequency with which we take photos, a family portrait would be a rare treat: cherished by the family, displayed a safe but noticeable place, and passed down through generations.

The portraits above were created with different processes.

(1) Photos like this one, mounted on hard card stock, were called **cabinet cards**. They became popular in the 1870s. Prior to this, a **carte de visite**, a smaller photograph the size of a visiting card, was often popular to trade and collect amongst friends when visiting. Cabinet cards measured 4 1/2" x 6 1/2" and declined in use in the early 1900s as personal and candid photography became more common. The photo is signed J. M. White of 938 Military Street, Port Huron.

Photos and information from Moore Museum archives

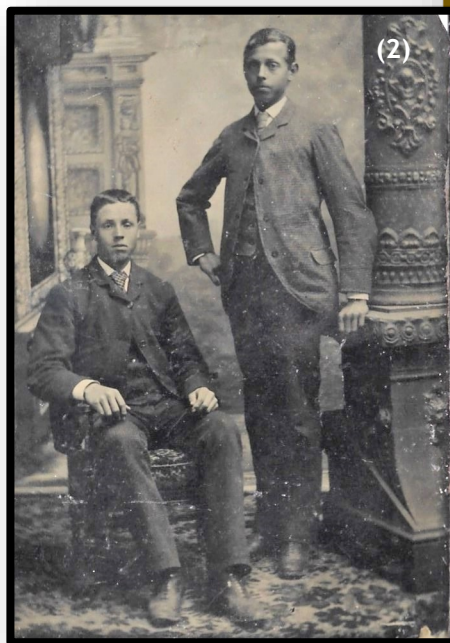
Museum train room receives donations

Curator Fiona Doherty

This past year the Moore Museum's train room was very fortunate to receive several generous donation. Two of the donations, in particular, have allowed us to plan some new exciting features for this year's Train Show on July 2/23. One of the scales modeled in the train room is "G" scale. "G", known as Garden Scale, is the largest scale operating at the Moore Museum. These trains can run inside or out, even in the rain or snow. One of the generous donations was "G" scale train and track supplies. This has allowed the Museum the opportunity to add another train

route in the Shaw Building, near the Train Room. The second donation is an impressive collection of 14 large scale models. The donation includes models of naval vessels, military rail equipment and aviation/ aerospace items. We plan to use these models as the nucleus of a new model display. In addition to Museum member's model collections, this year's Train Room and Train Show should be the best yet. So mark July 2 on your calendar for a visit to Moore Museum's annual Train Show for some new and exciting exhibits. Don't forget, you can always visit the Museum, March through to December, to tour the Train Room and the rest of this wonderful Museum.

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Sombra Museum project will celebrate historic local barns

The preservation of old barns in
Sombra Township
By Darrell Randall

The Sombra Museum is looking at the barns again. Twenty-two years ago, a millennium project to photograph the barns still standing in the township was completed. By that time, many of the old large barns, built with beams that were likely harvested from the property owners own bush, were beginning to disappear. Modern agriculture had changed from the mixed livestock base to more intensified production of either crops or livestock. The simple explanation is that those old barns became less practical as farming changed, but they were vitally important to the agricultural process that made change possible.

The Sombra Museum is undertaking a project for 2023 that will involve a review of the year 2000 photographs and the selection of some of the barns that are still standing to be photographed again to include in a calendar for 2024. A plan is in the works to host an opportunity to visit a historic old barn, learn how it has been used in the past, and see what has been done to re-purpose the building. There will also be a presentation and discussion at the Sombra Museum's lecture series in the fall.

Some of the old barns have been modified or had additions to continue service in ways very different from the original purpose.

Many barns were simply left idle for too long; they had deteriorated to a point where there was no option left but to remove the building. It is perfectly understandable as there can be significant costs to re-roof an old barn, or to paint it, or do foundation repairs. If the owner has no use for the barn, it is not going to last. It is not an easy call to keep up a building that is no longer in use.

In the millennium year, we believe there were 240 old barns in Sombra Township. We are not including the modern livestock barns, but we do include the old barns that have had additions built because that is part of the repurposing, and it preserves the original structure.

Within the former Sombra Township over the past twenty-two years, 87 barns were demolished. Without doing a close inspection, we rated the condition of the existing barns from the car window as poor if we could see that parts of the roof or siding were missing. At the time, 35 barns were listed in poor condition of the 153 still standing. We could not see the backs of the barns or get a look at their foundations, so the estimate for barns in poor condition is likely higher than 35.

We are always impressed with the architecture of barns that are 100 years old or over. The barns had to store hay and grain to feed the horses and cattle, as well as straw to provide bedding for the animals, and all that made it necessary to construct these large buildings. A vast amount of space was required in the mow to store hay and that affected the barn size and design. It is unbelievable to think that all this was done with hand tools, horses, and the help of many neighbours.

The old barn photographs taken around the millennium year have provided us with an incredible archive for the future. We are fortunate our muse-

um volunteers had the foresight to document this important architectural history to demonstrate their importance to early farming in Sombra, because it is inevitable that the number of old barns in the township will continue to decline.

However, we are pleased to report that some barn owners are maintaining their buildings and even undertaking renovation projects and finding new ways to continue using the barns. Examples of this type of construction will remain for the near future, but will certainly not exist on every farmstead, as it once did.



Above: A community barn-raising brought neighbours and their carpentry tools to the building site. It was understood that helping one's neighbour was a way of ensuring that, if you needed their help with a build some day, you'd have a crew to help you do it.

These barns were often built without the use of nails. Stout timber frames were joined using techniques like mortis-and-tenon, tongue-in-groove, and dovetail joints, and fastened in place with long, thick wooden pegs to ensure that the barn would stand for many decades.

A: The supportive skeleton of a barn wall is raised into position during a barn-raising.

B: With the supporting frame in place, the "pre-fab" roof frame is prepared for placement.

**Don't miss any of the upcoming
Sombra Museum events.
See Around the Township, page 20,
for more information.**