



PATHMASTER

Aims and objectives of the Pickering Township Historical Society, as embodied in its Constitution:

- (a) *To promote public interest in the history of Pickering and vicinity.*
- (b) *To research, record, preserve, and publish the history of the Pickering area.*
- (c) *To work with other heritage organizations in the Pickering area to identify and investigate historic and archaeological sites and to arrange to have them suitably marked when appropriate.*
- (d) *To work with other heritage organizations in the Pickering area to identify structures of historical significance or of outstanding architectural merit.*
- (e) *To publish and reprint historical documents and papers as may from time to time be decided upon by the directors and to arrange distribution of the same.*
- (f) *To act as consultants to any interested parties on matters relating to the history of the Pickering area.*
- (g) *To serve as an historical resource for the local boards of education, public libraries, and other appropriate educational bodies.*
- (h) *To maintain relationships, as appropriate, with other heritage organizations within the former Pickering Township, and with other historical societies outside of the Township.*
- (i) *To promote good stewardship in the treatment of our cultural heritage sites, artifacts, and documents; and to be advocates for the preservation of the same.*

IN THE BEGINNING

by Tom Mohr, President of the Pickering Township Historical Society

Welcome to the premiere edition of *Pathmaster*, the newsletter of the Pickering Township Historical Society. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce the organization—to describe some of our philosophy, aims, and objectives.

In these hectic days, it is easy to lose touch with our past. Our cultural heritage seems to pale behind the many problems we face as a modern society. Yet, to a large extent, it is our past that defines us. To a family newly arrived in Ajax/Pickering it may seem that our local history has little relevance to their lives. Consider, though, that these towns did not just appear out of thin air; that which draws newcomers, the present Towns of Pickering and Ajax, is the product of two centuries of growth.

The old Township of Pickering (which incorporated the present Towns of Pickering and Ajax, as well as a part of the Village of Port Union) has gone through many changes in its long history, and each era has left its mark on us. Though we may see little of our Native heritage, it remains reflected in the numerous archaeological sites which dot the countryside, as well as in the name by which one significant early Iroquoian group is known—Pickering Branch. Nor do we see much evidence of the French missionaries, fur traders, and explorers who were the first Europeans to visit these parts, but their presence is echoed in the names Rouge, Petticoat (Petite Côte), and, of course, Frenchman's Bay.

This township was first settled by Loyalists, Quakers, Mennonites, many different folk who saw opportunity in the virgin forests of this new land. Some fought and died in struggles against the new republic to the south; some gave their lives in rebellion against an autocratic colonial government. It was through their original patterns of settlement, in the agrarian countryside, as well as in the thriving villages, that the Township of Pickering gained the dual nature it boasts today.

At present, most of us live in the urban south of the towns. Our perspective seems defined by subdivisions that were named after whatever was bulldozed to make way for houses. That is the price of growth. But in this rush towards the millennium, we should not forget that which went before. We need to expand our personal horizons beyond our neighbourhoods and to include the rest of the (old

township in our definition of where we live. As residents, we now share a common heritage no matter where we were born. With that realization comes an enhanced sense of place. Ajax/Pickering is our home.

We, the Pickering Township Historical Society, see a role for ourselves in that process. We are not the first historical society to be active here. In fact, before their dissolution some twenty years ago, our predecessors published a fine history of the Township of Pickering and established the institution which now exists as the Pickering Museum Village. They left a formidable legacy. The municipalities have also done a commendable job of observing our heritage, but with the absence of an organized group, a generation has been deprived of active participation in our past.

This society hopes to offer those interested an opportunity to indulge their own particular heritage-oriented passions. We wish to educate our young in the rich history of their home. We will research; we will publish—starting with *Pathmaster*, then a journal, and perhaps a new local history that reflects new knowledge and fresh interpretation of the information at hand. We want to entertain with monthly programming, informative speakers, and trips afield. We want to be recognized as stewards of Pickering's collective past, and to take on the role of advocate if need be.

We need active participation to achieve these goals, and I encourage one and all to offer their support as we begin our membership drive. Our regular programming will remain free of charge and all are invited to join us, but the funds raised through a low annual fee will enable us to function as a serious heritage organization for the benefit of all residents. There are opportunities for everyone to take part in the Pickering Township Historical Society and I hope all of those reading will join in the adventure.

To conclude, I would like to offer personal thanks to those who have supported us in our formative stage, as well as those who have come out to the meetings and offered encouragement. We have a hard-working Board of Directors and Publishing Committee. Some of the results of their efforts appear before you in this newsletter. To those who signed up for other committee work, thank you, and we will be putting you to work soon, too.

WOMEN'S INSTITUTES OF ONTARIO CELEBRATE 100 YEARS

By: Judith Goulin

Adelaide Hunter Hoodless (1857-1910) was no ordinary housewife, nor was she only regarded as "wife-of," by all who knew her around the turn of the century. She was a woman of considerable intelligence and education who, after life dealt her the bitterest of lemons, made lemonade by founding the Women's Institute.

Adelaide Hoodless lost a child at 14 months after she gave him unsterilized milk according to the common practice of the time. When the doctor told her that this death could have been prevented, she felt she was to blame because she should have known more about child care. Whether this was the case or not is a moot point. What is important is what resulted from the tragedy.

She resolved that she would do everything in her power to "bring within the reach of all women the education necessary to prevent similar tragedies."¹ Leading a campaign for clean milk in Hamilton was only the first of many achievements for her in advancing the cause of women's education as informed homemakers.

At a meeting of the Ontario Farmers Experimental Union, in autumn 1896, Hoodless gave a stirring speech. In part, she said: "Girls should be educated to fit them properly for the sphere of life for which they were destined, that of homemaking, and this should be done by teaching domestic science in the public schools."² She felt that the curriculum was all wrong, that boys and girls in elementary school should be learning different things, and was not hesitant to voice her criticism in this matter. Erland Lee, who heard her that night, was so impressed that he asked her to speak to the women of Saltfleet Township during an upcoming farmers' meeting when their wives were going to be present. Her message to the Saltfleet women encouraged them to form an organization for themselves, similar to the Farmers' Institute for the men.

A week later at yet another talk, this time in Stoney Creek, she said: "If men felt the need of an organization

which enabled them to grow better crops of hay, grain and fruit, and produce better livestock, then indeed a similar group for women was much more necessary, since women's work — homecraft and mothercraft, was much more important — since it concerned the home and the care of the loved ones who dwelt therein."³ Erland Lee and his wife Janet, who were instrumental in getting the first W.I. started, are now considered as co-founders, along with Adelaide Hoodless.

The 101 women who showed up in Stoney Creek heard the clarion call. They quickly formed the first Women's Institute on 19 February

“BRING WITHIN THE REACH OF ALL WOMEN THE EDUCATION NECESSARY TO PREVENT SIMILAR TRAGEDIES.”

1897, electing Mrs. E.D. Smith as their first president. Originally the Women's Institute was affiliated with the provincial government. In time there were W.I. chapters in virtually every rural community in Ontario, throughout Canada, eventually becoming a global organization. A page from one of the early minute books of the Stoney Creek W.I. indicates their resolve. It reads: "A nation cannot rise above the level of its homes, therefore we women must work and study together to raise our homes to the highest possible level."⁴

The Women's Institute in Ontario celebrates its 100th anniversary this year. In the early years the local W.I. served a very important and very basic necessity for women isolated on farms — that of getting together and learning from one another how to do their jobs better. In this way, the importance of women's work was elevated. Early meetings included topics such as child care, nutrition, first aid, diseases, and home sanitation. As time went on, they broadened their

aims to reach outside their homes.

Just a few of the accomplishments of W.I.'s across Canada illustrate the scope of their work. They had an influence on many things which we now take for granted: a law making it mandatory for bread to be wrapped, stop signs at railroad crossings, pasteurized milk, hot school lunches, TB testing for food handlers, clearly marked poison containers, sex education in schools, and a law which requires cars to stop when a school bus is stopped.

In today's world, it is not surprising to discover that many branches of the Women's Institute have disbanded, since the need which the W.I. once

filled for rural women can now be met in myriad ways. There are two still-active local W.I.'s: Clarendon and Altona. The Clarendon Women's Institute, founded in 1909, currently has about fifteen members. Earlier this year they celebrated the W.I. centennial with the women of Altona. They dressed in 1897 costume, watched a play about the history of their organization, and enjoyed one another's company.

Those of us interested in history appreciate the immeasurable contribution that the Women's Institutes of Ontario have made to historical research through their Tweedsmuir scrapbooks. When Lord Tweedsmuir, John Buchan, served as Governor General of Canada, from 1935 to 1940, Lady Tweedsmuir took great interest in the work of the Women's Institutes. When she heard that the W.I.'s were planning on compiling history scrapbooks, she was most enthusiastic about this project. In her visits to many branches, she said to the members: "I am very glad to hear that

Women's Institutes are going to compile village history books. Events move very fast nowadays, houses are pulled down, new roads are made, and the aspect of the countryside changes completely in a short time. It is a most useful and satisfying task for W.I. members to see that nothing valuable is lost or forgotten." This quotation appears on the first page of every Tweedsmuir scrapbook. Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario decided to act upon her suggestion, and thus a history scrapbook, named after Lady Tweedsmuir, became the project for each branch of the institute.

The parent organization laid out guidelines which determined that these history scrapbooks should include a history of the local W.I., general community history, and histories of individual families and their homes, schools and education, churches and their organizations, industries past and present, libraries, municipal government, recreation, and war records. Today innumerable libraries have photocopies, if not the originals, of this most useful secondary source material.

Another legacy from the Women's Institutes is their minute books. Each branch of the Women's Institute kept minutes of all their meetings in lined, hard-cover notebooks which were provided free by the Women's Institute Branch and Home Economics Service, Ontario Department of Agriculture. Each book was expected to last three years. At the front of each minute book are instructions which state that: "Minutes should be a clear, concise record of the proceedings, written legibly."⁵ It is because the women kept detailed minutes of their meetings including dates, members' names, activities, and financial records, that today they provide us with an excellent primary historical reference source.

It is the practice of each Women's Institute branch to retain its minute books and Tweedsmuir scrapbooks until the group disbands, then to turn them over to libraries and museums

Worth Celebrating: MILESTONES IN THE LIVES OF EDGE AND BETTY PEGG

by John W. Sabeau

Edge and Betty Pegg passed some milestones this spring. Edge celebrated his 85th birthday on the 10th of May, and the couple celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on the 21st of June. On both occasions large gatherings of family and friends were there to congratulate them. [The actual anniversary dates are 8 May and 27 June.]

Over the years the Peggs have contributed much to the communities of Claremont and Greenwood and, indeed, to the whole of Pickering Township. Edge, short for Edgerton, was born here, in the house which still stands at the south-east corner of Claremont Conservation Area. At one time most of the eastern half of the conservation area was the Pegg family farm, where Edge and his four brothers and four sisters were raised. About 1960, after the Pegg children had moved out onto their own farms, the 150 acre property was sold to the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. The MTRCA has since expanded it to its present 400 acres which encompasses the whole block.

After their marriage in 1947, Betty and Edge moved to a home-stead just across the street (Concession 7) from the old family farm. The house which had been built on the property some years before had burned to the ground and Edge had to completely rebuild. Here Edge operated a 112-acre dairy farm. When Edge retired from farming they sold all but 4 1/2 acres and built the house where they now reside. Betty herself planned the house which was built from logs harvested in their own woodlot and sawed at the old mill in Tyrone.

Farming, of course, occupied much of Edge's time, but he enjoyed playing sports when he could. He played both baseball and hockey in the local township leagues. He says that in those days he had to pay 25¢ to get into the park in order to play ball. Often he would play in a double-header which might not end until midnight. Before the games began, of course, he would have to milk the

cows and complete his other chores. And then it was up early the next morning to start all over again. In spite of this he continued to play both baseball and hockey well past the age of 40.

As if these activities were not enough, Edge, along with Betty and their two children, Kathy and Hal, formed a musical troupe which played at church garden parties around the countryside. Betty played the piano, Edge the banjo, the ukulele, the xylophone, and even a musical saw. They presented western and hillbilly shows which Betty wrote and directed. This continued for years until the

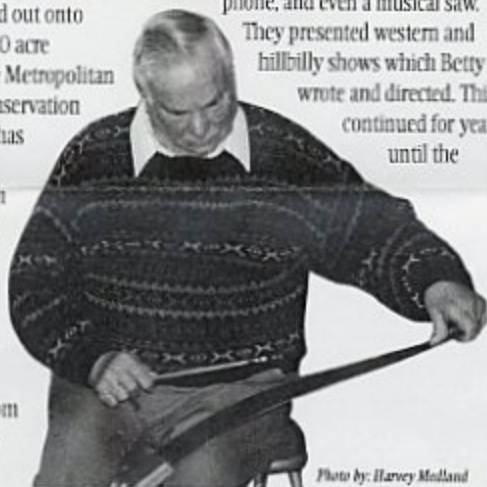


Photo by: Harvey Molland

children grew up. At Edge's birthday party in May this year, the family treated the guests to a sampling of the music, stories, and jokes that were once part of their shows. Edge even tuned up his old saw (and promises to teach me how to play it).

In more recent years Edge has become one of Pickering's foremost natural historians. His knowledge of wildlife — largely self-taught — is deep and his enthusiasm boundless. After pursuing his interest on his own in the 1950s, he and Betty joined the Durham Region Field Naturalists in 1961. He learned much from his association with other members of the organization. Later, he was to be one of the founders of the Pickering Naturalists. He also has written numerous articles on nature for

local newspapers, including a series of articles he wrote for the *Ajax Advertiser* when R.D. Lawrence was its editor. Over the years, Edge has met and shared his interest with some of the world's top birders, including Roger Tory Peterson and Norm Chesterfield (for many years Canada's foremost birder).

During the years when Edge was farming, Betty was teaching school along with raising her family. In the beginning she taught music, then took time out to have her two children. When she went back it was to teach kindergarten first at West Rouge, then at Bay View Heights (in Bay Ridges), and finally at Claremont Public School. She retired from teaching after twenty-two years.

Betty's retirement gave her the opportunity to learn a craft in which she had always had an interest: weaving. She took courses, joined a guild, and developed into a creative and talented weaver.

Weaving, however, is only one of Betty's interests. She is also a superb photographer. At one time she took wedding pictures; then Edge suggested she try her hand at nature

photography, and she has never looked back. Her photographs have won prizes in competition, have been published in newspapers, and hang on the walls of many who have purchased them or received them as gifts. One of her present projects is to photograph old barns.

Betty also continues the music tradition in the family. She was for many years the organist at Greenwood United Church. She has also been active as a member of that church in other capacities, such as serving as President of the United Church Women's group, and presently, as an Elder.

Both Betty and Edge are collectors. They enjoy wildlife art and display a number of prints of such well-known artists as Robert Bateman and Marc Barrie, both of whom they number among their friends. They have exceptional collections of such things as barbed wire, automobile licence plates, maple sap spigots, and bottles and jugs. Edge has also created a series of model pioneer fences which he puts on display occasionally at the Pickering Museum Village.

Congratulations Betty and Edge on achieving these milestones in your lives. You have made great contributions over the years to our community. You have taught us to enjoy and to preserve our wildlife and natural areas, to cherish our human heritage, and to appreciate our villages histories. We are in your debt.



Photo by: Laurel Sawchuk

YOU!

Calling for articles and photographs!

by Lys Laurence

The editorial committee hopes that you have enjoyed this first issue of *Pathmaster*. The next issue is planned for December and contributions of all kinds are welcome. Must all topics go far back into the past? No! Changes in your neighbourhood over the past five years constitute history as much as something that happened in 1797. The field is wide open and we want to hear from you.

Do you remember something about the first time you saw this area? Would it make an interesting story? We want reminiscences of longtime residents, as well as those of recent residents. Why did you move here? Did you emigrate from another country, and is there a story associated with your decision to move to Pickering?

Family histories may be submitted, or biographies of well known individuals in our area. Articles about local cemeteries, roads, or

schools are welcome. The history of a local business could be interesting, either a former business, or one still in operation. Many people would like to learn about the history of certain houses or other landmark buildings. Photographs are actively sought in relation to the architectural history of Pickering.

There are numerous smaller villages and hamlets within the Pickering Township area. In future issues, we could benefit from histories and photographic essays of these settlements.

To submit materials to *Pathmaster*, please send to Michael Cummins, 1476 Fieldlight Blvd., Pickering, Ontario, L1V 2S4, or call Michael at 905-839-1557. Submissions may also be sent via E-mail to cummins@total.net. Please include all pertinent information about yourself and any documentation utilized in your article.

ATTENTION STUDENTS!

By: Michael Cummins

History is fun, easy to get involved with, and interesting. It is as simple as talking with your grandparents and listening to the stories they tell about what they have experienced. This article is about the many ways in which you may become involved with history and the Pickering Township Historical Society.

History is not just researched and written by professional historians. Anyone may research and write about history, but what is considered history? Well, this question does not have a simple answer. History involves what happened in the past, but one intriguing part of history is the fact that what interests one person, may not interest another. Therefore, everyone may pursue their very own subject.

Students are in a particularly good position to research topics which interest them, while also fulfilling the requirements of their course. Whether you are an elementary, high school, college, or university student, you will be able to pursue a subject which interests you, and maybe one which has never been attempted before.

Researching a topic of interest is not difficult, but it may take some time to find all the information you need. It is the research which can make history fun, because you will always discover something new. Researching for a topic should begin with you, the researcher. Once you have decided upon a subject which interests you, it is time to begin, and the best place to begin is with a book which might give you an understanding of the topic, a book which will give you the historical context of your area of interest, and possibly provide you with a basis from which you may proceed further.

To continue your research, go to your local library or school library and ask for assistance; the staff will be more than happy to aid you in your search. The librarians will be able to point out other topics which relate to your topic, and where you should look for important information. Gathering the necessary information is very important, because from these sources you will be drawing a great deal of data, so you will

want to make sure that your sources are accurate and current.

Libraries are a good place to collect information, however, there are a number of other places which you might want to consider once you have visited your library. Other places which will be able to provide you with information are archives, local history collections, businesses, schools, cemeteries, and community members. These sources all can provide you with more information about your topic once you have done some research and know what you are looking for. For instance, an archive may provide you with original documents or pictures which relate to your topic.

Local history collections, like the one found in the Pickering Central Library, offer information on your neighbourhood. Businesses which have been part of the community or which deal in your area of interest, might provide you with information which is not found in a library or archive. Schools are also a good source for information, whether you speak to a teacher or look at the Year Books to see how the school changes, as well as what the different fashions were over the years.

A cemetery is a place where history is on display for all respectful visitors to see. Reading the headstones may reveal a great deal about what has occurred in the community over the years, such as when a disease may have swept through the area.

Last, but certainly not least, are members of the community; if you are researching your neighbourhood, chances are that there is someone close to you who has lived there for a long time and may be able to tell you about all of the changes which have taken place since they have been there. No matter which path you choose to take, the most important part of your topic is to make sure that you are interested in it.

History can be anything you want it to be. You can study wars, politics, fashion, music, or whatever else may be of interest to you. If you have any questions, or if you are interested in starting some research and want some help, you can always contact the Pickering Township Historical Society for more information.



WHAT'S IT?

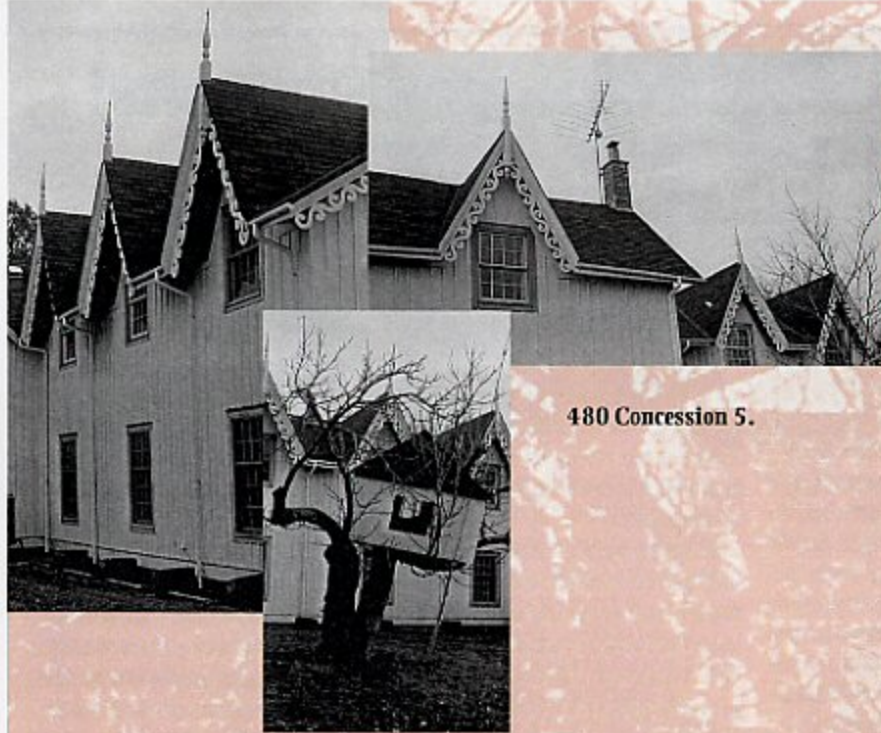
by Dave Marlowe

Can you identify the object pictured here? It is about 10-12 cm in length, is made of iron, and would usually be found around the barn.

If you think you know what this item is send your answer to *Pathmaster*. All will be revealed in the next issue of the newsletter, along with the names of those who were able to correctly identify this month's "What's it?"



Dave Marlowe is Educational Officer of the Pickering Museum Village.



480 Concession 5.



460 Concession 5.



470 Concession 5.

THE HAMLET OF WHITEVALE

Photography by John W. Sabean.
Layout by John Cormier.

A hidden idyll on the outskirts of Toronto, Whitevale is an old milltown whose residents still enjoy the rural life although close to the big city. The community of Whitevale has been designated as a Heritage Conservation District, under the Ontario Heritage Act.

Whitevale Cemetery

The Whitevale Cemetery is the final resting place for the hamlet's name sake, Truman P. White. Also located here are the graves of a number of the Major family, for whom the original name Majorville was derived.

"Unknown Stranger, 1854"

This headstone commemorates an unidentified traveller who came to Whitevale sometime during the year 1854, and died there in the Whitevale Hotel. No one ever claimed the body.

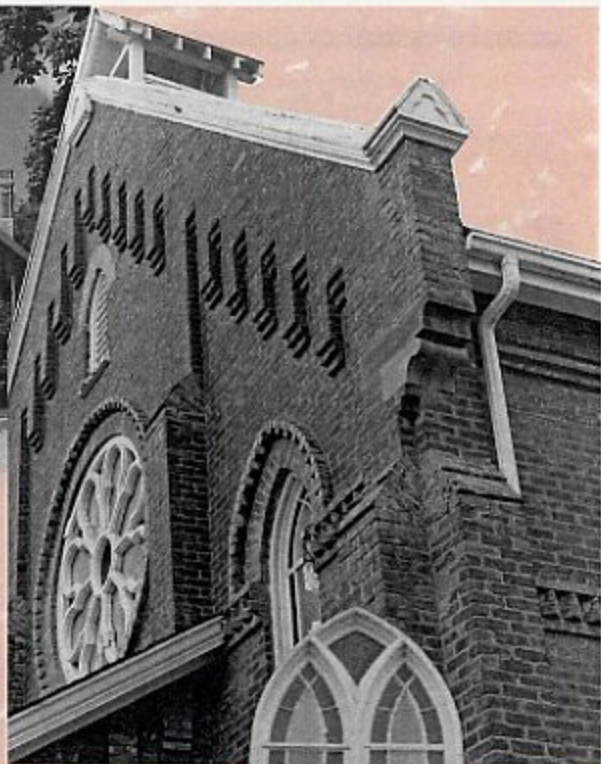


565 Concession 5.
Gothic revival home dating from the 1890s, located on the hill east of the hamlet.



460, 470, and 480 Concession 5.

These 3 homes side by side in the centre of the hamlet are all Gothic revival townhomes dating from about 1875.

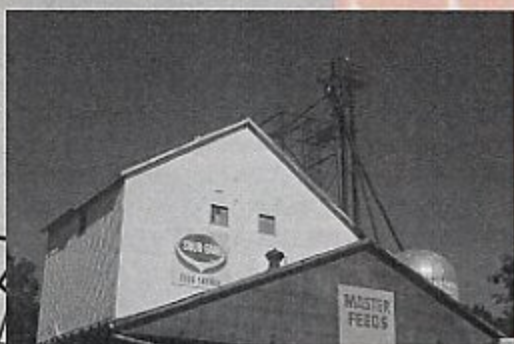


Whitevale Mill

This is the only remaining mill of a number that were once clustered along the banks of West Duffins Creek in the heart of the hamlet.

Whitevale United (Wesleyan Methodist) Church

The congregation dates from 1854, the church building from 1884. Note its distinctive features: stepped brickwork (corbelling); stained-glass rose window in the gable; stained-glass lancet windows on either side of the main entrance; steeply-pitched roof crowned with bell tower.



NAMES IN THE NEWS: FRED AND BESS HOUSSER

An Artistic Note

by John W. Sabean

As far as I know, Lawren Stewart Harris, one of the leaders of the Group of Seven, never painted any of his landscapes in Pickering Township; he did, however, paint the portrait of one of Pickering's residents.

Bess Houser (1890-1969), née Larkin, had married Frederick Broughton Houser (1889-1936) in 1914. At the time of their marriage, Fred Houser was a clerk at the Central Loan and Savings Company in Toronto, but in the 1920s he was to become the financial editor of the *Toronto Daily Star*. In 1915, the Housers purchased a home and property on Lot 13, Concession 2 in Pickering Village (the house is now 456 Kingston Road West). Whether the Housers lived in the house year round or just in the summers is uncertain. The Toronto Directories have no listings for the Housers between 1916 and 1919, but from 1920 on they again show a Toronto residence. It is known, however, that between 18 June 1916 and 8 June 1919, the Housers were visited in their Pickering home by their friends Doris and Gordon Mills many times throughout the year. The Housers did not sell the Pickering residence until May 1922.

Sometime early in 1920, Lawren Harris painted Bess Houser's portrait. It was in that same year that Harris and a number of his painter friends formed the Group of Seven and had their first exhibition—in May at the Art Gallery of Toronto. *Portrait of Bess* (or "The

Christian Scientist") was one of three portraits he exhibited in that first show. (The portrait is now in the collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario. A colour plate may be seen in Peter Larisey, *Light for a Cold Land: Lawren Harris's Work and Life—An Interpretation* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1993), plate 36.)

The Housers had been long-time friends of Lawren Harris. Fred and Lawren had first met when they were students together at St. Andrews College in the early years of the century, and they would continue to meet at the Arts and Letters Club of which they were both members. It was Fred Houser who was to write the first history of the Group of Seven: *A Canadian Art Movement: The Story of the Group of Seven* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1926).

In 1934, the relationship took an odd turn: Fred divorced Bess, and Harris divorced his wife Trixie; Bess married Harris, and Fred married painter Yvonne McKague. They all remained good friends, however, except for Trixie Harris, who was left empty-handed.

In Bess Houser, Pickering has another claim to artistic fame: she was one of four women who initiated the practice of renting works of art. The real instigators were Group of Seven artist J.E.H. MacDonald and Bess's best friend Doris Mills, who apparently both thought of the idea at the same time. Mrs. Mills rented several paint-

ings from MacDonald in the spring of 1919. When her friends learned of this they decided to follow suit, and thus was born in November of that year the "Circulating System" of art rental, whereby Mills and Houser, along with Lucile Taylor (whose portrait was also painted in 1920 by Lawren Harris) and Mrs. Kenneth T. Young rented for a year 12 paintings from such artists as MacDonald, Harris, Arthur Lismer, and A.Y. Jackson. Each would keep three paintings on their walls for three months, then they would swap paintings until by the end of the year each had all 12 paintings in their homes for a period. Then these paintings would be returned to the artists and 12 more paintings rented. Note, too, that this was begun in the year before the Group of Seven was formed.

Art rental seems like a good idea now, and it attracted many people by the mid-1920s, but there was one journalist who was not greatly inspired by the idea. The *Toronto Star Weekly* sent out a young reporter to see if there was a story. This was only the second assignment for the reporter since he had come to Toronto and joined the newspaper staff and for the story he wrote he earned \$5. Sarcastically he wrote: "After being asked by a writer for the *Star Weekly* for a story on the new application of Harvey's principle of circulation," one of the renters "talked it over with the other circulatees and they decided that the publication of their names or the names of the

artists would give a taint of commercialism to the entire scheme which would quite spoil it." Renting art, he concluded, was just the silly idea of a few women who had too much time on their hands. The young journalist was to spend the next three years writing for the *Star Weekly*, then left to pursue his career in other ways in other places. His name was Ernest Hemingway.

For two of the women, the rental scheme bore further fruit: they themselves learned to paint. Again it was Doris Mills who led the way. Without any instruction, and with just enough help from A.Y. Jackson to purchase the right materials, she went off by herself and started to paint. Not content with that, she invited her friend Bess Houser to join her on painting excursions. Within two years the two were invited to exhibit their work at the Women's Art Association. In 1926, the two women became invited contributors to the Group of Seven exhibition, and shortly thereafter each had had paintings chosen to travel abroad as part of Canadian exhibitions at international shows. For several years in the 1920s Bess also conducted a monthly column on art for the *Canadian Bookman*.

Doris Mills later married Murray Speirs and moved to Pickering in 1948 where she lived for the next 40 years, until her death in 1989.



Photo by Doris Mills



Photo by John W. Sabean

A CAPSULE HISTORY OF THE TOWNSHIP OF PICKERING

Prepared for the Inaugural Meeting of the Pickering Township Historical Society, 7 May 1997.

by John W. Sabeau

What follows are a number of snapshots of Pickering Township at various times in its history. Each snapshot introduces one aspect of our rich heritage.

I. 10 000 years ago: Lake Iroquois (Our Ecological Heritage)

The Town of Pickering exhibits some interesting physical features left to it by the glacial age. Most significant is the Oak Ridges Moraine formed by the convergence of two ice lobes which deposited glacial till between them. The Moraine marks the northern boundary of Pickering.

The area between the Oak Ridges Moraine and Lake Ontario is called a till plain. Across the plain, west to east, the shoreline of the ancient Lake Iroquois can readily be discerned through much of Pickering.

Dispersed throughout the plain are long ridges or oval shaped hills formed by glacial drift known as drumlins. A dozen drumlins are scattered throughout the present township.

The Rouge and Petticoat Creek valleys are remnants of the Carolinian (or Southern Deciduous) Forest. The western end of Frenchman's Bay marks the northern limit (and in Ontario the eastern limit) of the Carolinian Forest. East and north of this is the Great Lakes-St Lawrence Forest Region, a transition forest of mixed conifers and hardwoods. At the boundary of these two forest regions, the Town of Pickering accommodates species of both, therefore providing a unique diversity.

Frenchman's Bay is one of the most significant natural sites in the greater Toronto Area. It is a highly-valued ecological community: with provincially-rare plants, regionally-rare breeding birds, significant fish habitat, and an important stopover for migrating waterfowl and shorebirds.

The glacial, geological, and ecological heritage of Pickering is rich. It has provided an abundance of forest, fertile soil for farming when cleared, a safe harbour for shipping, and a great variety of wildlife.

II. 1630: Huronia (Our Indian heritage)

The archaeological evidence for the presence of humans in this area dates back at least 4000 years along Duffins Creek and the Rouge River. In more recent times, the Rouge was the beginning of a major Indian portage between Lake Ontario and the Holland River (with access to Lake Huron).

On the eve of European arrival in the 15th & 16th centuries, there were two rival trading alliances in Ontario & New York: the Huron Confederacy (Hurons, Petuns, Neutrals) and the Iroquois (or 5 Nations) Confederacy (Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, Senecas & Tuscaroras in 1720). The Hurons were in possession when the Europeans arrived in the 17th century. The population of Huronia in 1630 was over 30 000. In the mid-seventeenth century the Five Nations Iroquois drove the Hurons out of the area and established a number of villages along the north shore of Lake Ontario. One of these villages, Ganatsekwyagon, established by the Senecas (Iroquois), was somewhere between the mouth of the Rouge and Frenchman's Bay.

The French attempted to monopolize the fur trade and a rivalry developed between the French and the Iroquois. Eventually the Iroquois retreated from southern Ontario, and the void made by their departure was filled by the Mississaugas (Ojibway).

There is little evidence now of Indian presence, except in archaeological finds. The nearest Mississaugas are on Scugog Island. The Indians, however, have left us a great legacy, and during the early years of white settlement helped smooth the way for the settlers.

III. 1669: Fenelon at Ganatsekwyagon (Our French Heritage)

To the Seneca village (Ganatsekwyagon) came many of the early French traders and explorers, including Jean Peré and Adrien Jolliet (brother of the more famous Louis Jolliet), who stopped here

in the summer of 1669 on their way to Lake Superior in search of copper.

One Frenchman stayed for a season. François de Salignac de Fenelon, a Sulpician missionary, spent the winter of 1669-70 with the Seneca of Ganatsekwyagon. The traditional story is that the winter was an extremely harsh one, forcing the Indians to scatter into the surrounding forests to hunt. Fenelon, who probably intended to establish a mission school in the Indian village, had to go with them. He survived on the few squirrels and other small animals he could find, and reportedly at times was reduced to eating the fungi that grew at the base of the trees. In the spring he retreated to Quinte discouraged and in broken health. In fact, there is little basis for this account (including the harsh winter) and strong evidence that Fenelon was successful in his efforts, and because of his success was rewarded by being put in charge of the mission school in Montreal. In any case, Fenelon's sojourn at Frenchman's Bay is notable for two reasons: he was the first European resident in the Toronto area, and he established the first school in the region.

The only reminder of the French presence in the area today is in a number of place names. For example the Rouge River was so-named because of its red clay banks. Petticoat Creek was originally Petite Côte ["little side"] Creek, a name derived probably from the fact that the east bank of the creek is quite high, while the west bank is almost flat near its mouth. And, of course, Frenchman's Bay commemorates the French presence, and probably is named for Fenelon himself, as was Fenelon Falls (although there is some dispute about both names).

IV. 1811: European Settlement (Our Loyalist Heritage)

The French never established permanent settlement in Pickering.

In 1759-60, with the fall of Quebec and Montreal, the whole country passed into the hands of the British.

Settlement, however, still had to wait another 40 years, but during that time some preparations were made. In 1787, the land was purchased from the Mississaugas. Four years later (1791), what was eventually to become Ontario was named Canada West. In the same year Augustus Jones surveyed Pickering, naming the township Edinburgh. The first land grants were made under Lt.-Gov. John Graves Simcoe.

The name Duffins came from an Irish trader who lived in the area of what is now Pickering Village. He is a shadowy figure about whom little is known. He is reputed to have been a "genial Irishman" who opened his home to whatever travellers might be passing by. According to tradition, one of these travellers, repaid his hospitality by murdering him. His name appears attached to the creek as early as 1791.

The earliest known permanent European settlers of Pickering Township, apart from the unfortunate Duffin, were fur trader and Indian interpreter William Peak and his wife Margaret who came to the mouth of Duffins Creek about 1800. They cleared the land on the west side of Duffins Creek (Simcoe Point).

By 1808 the population of Pickering had increased to 180 people. A year or two later a considerable influx of settlers to Pickering Township occurred when Timothy Rogers, a native of Vermont, brought in a number of Quaker families. Rogers also built the first grist mill on Duffins Creek, and probably the first sawmill.

A Town meeting was held as early as 1803 in conjunction with Whitby Township, but the first Town meeting for Pickering alone occurred in 1811. The officers elected were: a Town Clerk, 2 Assessors, a Collector, 4 Pathfinders, 2 Poundkeepers, and 2 Town Wardens.

The early settlers were all Loyalists who left the United States after the American Revolutionary War and accepted the offer of land in Upper Canada.

V. 1850: Mid-century prosperity (Our British & Irish Heritage)

The first order of business for the settlers was the clearing of land to build homes and to plant crops. The building of public buildings — schools, churches, court houses, and the like — had to await a more established settlement. In the meanwhile grist and woollen mills, breweries and tanneries were built, the first efforts at industrial life. In addition, improvements were made in communications, first through the building of Kingston Road and then toward the middle of the century, the upgrading of the port at Frenchman's Bay.

Frenchman's Bay, with its fine natural harbour, became increasingly important as a port for the export of ship masts, pine logs, and squared timber. A wharf was built at the north end of the bay (1850s?), and dredging, begun as early as 1843, cleared a channel large enough to admit larger ships from Lake Ontario. It is reported that in the year 1845 alone, with 20 sawmills in operation in the township, one million metres of lumber were exported through Frenchman's Bay. By mid-century more than half of Pickering Township was cleared of its once abundant trees.

Brock Road, the first north-south route, followed an old Indian trail, and was opened in 1808. It connected the Quaker settlements in Pickering Village, Uxbridge, and Newmarket. It also paved the way for the development of the Pickering hinterland. Several villages were cited along the Brock Road, and on the concession road allowances: Whitevale, Brougham, Claremont, Greenwood, Altona, Atha Road, Balsam, Kinsale, Brock Road, Cherrywood, Cherrywood Station, Clarkes Hollow, Deckers Hill, Dixie, Green River, and Mount Zion. Each of these villages has its own history.

Pickering residents took part in the War of 1812, and played a major role in both sides of the Rebellion of 1837.

Administratively, from 1791 to the early 1850s, Pickering was part of the Home District, then part of Ontario County. In 1841: Canada West became Upper Canada, and in 1867, Upper Canada became Ontario.

After the War of 1812, immigration came primarily from Great Britain and Ireland, and it is to these settlers as well as to the Loyalists that we owe the earliest elements of our society.

VI. 1875: Growth and Decline (Our Agricultural Heritage)

When the Grand Trunk Railway (later the CNR) was opened through Pickering in 1856, use of Frenchman's Bay as a port declined sharply. However, the provincial government poured in money for an upgrading of the facilities. A new wharf replaced the old one, a lighthouse was built, a new channel was dredged, and a 50 000 bushel elevator was constructed. Once again the bay became a bustling port. This time it was barley that became the chief export. Wagons would line the road all the way to Liverpool Road waiting to unload their cargoes of barley which were destined for the breweries of the United States. All this ended when an American duty on the importation of barley closed the market and once again the port went into decline.

The latter half of the 19th century saw many improvements in agriculture and in the breeding of stock. Pickering farmers were very much in the forefront of these developments. Although markets fluctuated and made life tough for farmers they continued to produce their crops on some of the finest farmland around.

The population went through a period of steady decline which continued to the middle of the next century.

VII. 1900: Resorting to Pickering (Our Recreational Heritage)

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century several cottage communities were established in Pickering Township, and the area became a recreational centre with Torontonians vacationers discovering the Bay. The cottage communities were Rosebank, Fairport Village, and Fairport Beach (originally Dunbarton Shores) around the Bay, and Squire's Beach in the Duffin's Creek area.

So popular was Rosebank as a summer resort that it eventually had its own train station and was served by seven passenger trains as well as Picnic Specials. It also had its own post office from 1916. In the 1920s, Cecil White, with a vision of creating the "Venice of North America", hired Italian architects to design canals and bridges modelled after those in Venice. Some of the channels that were dredged in the Rouge are still visible, but the bridge which was built to connect Woodgrange Avenue and Westpoint Avenue has disappeared. The project

itself collapsed after the stock market crash in 1929.

Early development on Frenchman's Bay began on the east side. This was the economic centre of Pickering Township when the bay was a shipping port. The village itself, as shown on the Ontario County Atlas in 1877, was limited to a very small area around Front Road and Commerce Street, and apparently never expanded beyond these limits. In the first half of the twentieth century, Fairport Village and its environs became a cottage community.

During the summer, there was a mass movement out of the city of Toronto to Pickering's cottage communities. In time the cottages were winterized and the number of residents stabilized.

VIII. 1950: Mid-century Prosperity Again (Our Industrial Heritage)

In the first half of the 20th century, Pickering Township remained largely a rural, farming community. Pickering residents fought in both world wars, and what was to become the Town of Ajax was the site of a large munitions plant. After the Second World War, Pickering saw increasing industrial growth.

Also in the boom years following WWII, subdivisions began to appear. Bay Ridges was the first of these subdivisions to be built. It was begun in the early 1960s on what was then farm land. Many of the original landowners and/or their descendants are still living in the area. The community of West Shore soon followed.

IX. 1975: Ajax and Durham (Our Immigrant Heritage)

As a result of their effort during the war, the people of Ajax had gained a new sense of identity. In 1954 they made a submission for town status, which they were awarded, and in 1955, they became the Town of Ajax, the name being derived from the British warship HMS Ajax, one of the ships in the fleet which defeated the German pocket battleship Graf Spee in the Battle of the River Plate in 1939.

In its present form the Town of Pickering was established in 1975 as a result of the reorganization of local government. It encompasses most of the older Township of Pickering, except that Pickering Village was amalgamated with the Town of Ajax, and the

West Rouge Community was incorporated into the Borough (now City) of Scarborough.

Also in 1975, Petticoat Creek Conservation Area was created from grown-over farmland with remnant areas of Carolinian Hardwood Forest. It is a 72-hectare park along the lakefront with bluffs rising to 10 metres above the waterline. It is managed by the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (MTRCA), as are Greenwood and Claremont Conservation Areas.

In recent years new waves of immigration have brought to Pickering a great diversity of culture. People from all over the globe have come to reside in our towns and thereby have greatly enriched our society.

X. 1997: Today and Tomorrow (Approaching 200 Years)

Today, Pickering is a prosperous town of almost 70 000 people on the eastern border of Metropolitan Toronto. Most of its residents live in an urban area within five kilometres of the Lake Ontario shoreline, but a rapidly increasing population is resulting in a northward expansion.

The flow of traffic has been reversed from earlier in the century. Every weekday morning hundreds of Pickering residents travel by rail and by car to offices in downtown Toronto.

Today, the lakeshore is being rediscovered, Petticoat Creek Conservation Area, Frenchman's Bay, and the Waterfront Trail are providing many opportunities for recreation.

There is also an increasing interest in the environment. Pickering will not return to the forested state of the pre-settlement years, nor will it maintain its rural character. Change will come inevitably, but will it come at the expense of the best of our heritage, or will we learn to accommodate our heritage with progress?

We are fast approaching the 200th anniversary of European Settlement (the year 2000), and, in the established form of celebrating our past, the year 2011 will mark 200 years of civic government.

Pickering has a history worth celebrating and a heritage worth preserving. We need to work together to see that what the land and its people have given to us is not lost.

THE POSTS OF AJAX/PICKERING

By Pat McCauley

The presence of three venerable Post family homes in Pickering/Ajax (Post Inn, Post Manor and Post Hill) can be traced back to one couple, George Washington Post I and Elizabeth Anna Knowles. George, born in 1779, was a son of Jordon Post and Abigail Loomis who came to York from Hebron, Connecticut, about 1780.

George moved to Scarborough in the early nineteenth century and met Elizabeth (born in 1786), eldest daughter of William and Mary Knowles who immigrated to Highland Creek from New Jersey about 1802, and became one of the earliest families to have settled in the area. George and Elizabeth were married in 1805, and were blessed only one year later with their first child, Asa Post. George was the proprietor of a tavern in Scarborough. A public spirited man, in 1806 he replaced William Knowles as overseer of highways and fences, and in 1810 he served on a grand jury. He was also a member of the Masonic Order.

About 1813, George and Elizabeth moved with their young family to Pickering, settling on Kingston Road about one mile west of the Whitby bor-

der. They cleared and farmed their land until they were able to build an impressive, two-storey brick inn, complete with an upper ballroom on Lot 5, Concession 1, in 1815. At this time there were 378 people living in Pickering.



Post Inn became an important stopping place for coaches between Toronto and Kingston. Their nearby farm was also the scene for pioneer ploughing matches, such as the one which took place in 1850, which witnessed a match between Vaughan and Scarborough

Townships, with Scarborough carrying off the prize.

The Posts had ten children: Asa, Hiram, Jordan, George Washington II, John, Robert, Henry, Sybil, Anna, and Sarah. The Posts employed household servants who lived with them, one of whom, Ann O'Reilly, became the wife of Asa Post. Asa farmed two hundred acres across the road from his parental home and achieved fame in his agricultural pursuits. He was the father of Albert Asa Post who became the designated architect for Ontario County, building homes, schools, and churches here and subsequently in

Buffalo, New York.

Jordon Post built Post Manor about 1841. His brother George Washington Post II, built Post Hill in 1856. Robert was managing the Inn during 1832 when cholera swept the area and caused his death at 25. Henry was only 22 when he died in 1848, and his sisters erected a headstone for him. Hiram and his family were proprietors of the Inn in 1851.

George Washington Post I died in 1828 and Elizabeth in 1833, neither having reached the age of fifty. Their final resting place is in the Ley Family Cemetery on Mill Street in Pickering Village, along with four of their sons and others of their family.

Amazingly, after over 180 years, the Post Inn still stands at 367 Kingston

Road East in Ajax. Today the red brick is covered by stucco on the sides and blue siding at the front and only its conformation hints at its former grandeur. However, it must have been a wonderful comfort to travellers in the nineteenth century, having lunched and jounced over the crest sloping down to Carruther's Creek to see the light shining from the half moon window and smoke rising from the double chimneys.

Post Hill, at 132 Kingston Road East, and Jordan Post's Post Manor, on the northwest corner of Kingston Road and Brock Road, also survive thanks to some public spirited initiatives. We hope these treasures of the early history of Ajax/Pickering will always be with us.

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HOLE-IN-THE-WALL THE DUNBARTON CULVERT

By Jerry Paris

What is this? Why was it here?

Where did the road go?

The Baseline Road (now called Bayly Street in Pickering and Ajax, Victoria Street in Whitby, and Bloor Street in Oshawa and Courtice) was the closest continuous road parallel to Lake Ontario passing through Ontario County. When travellers went west on the Baseline, they would get a relatively straight road until they reached Liverpool Road when they were forced to turn north or south. A left turn would, in days past, take one south to the port of Frenchman's Bay, with its grain elevators, fishing vessels, and cottages. If you took a right turn you would go north only a short distance, then the Baseline Road continued west-

ward, down a steep hill into the creek valley, parallel to the Grand Trunk Railway line leading to Toronto.

A little less than a kilometre west of Liverpool Road, the Baseline Road again was forced to make a detour because of a marsh and swampy area which had a northern boundary of the railway line during times of high water. Travellers turned right, avoiding this swampy area, and went under the cut stone archway leading to the side road now known as Dixie Road, or alternatively following another road which wound northwest into the village of Dunbarton to Dunchurch Street. A connection was made to Kingston Road by either route.

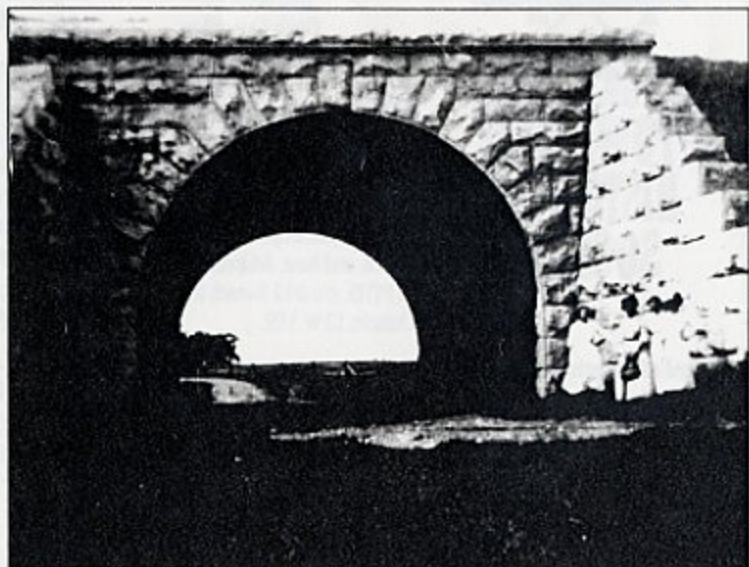


Photo: from the album of Dora Skitch (Chaworth) and Lillian McCauley (Chaworth)

NOW THAT WE HAVE A NEWSLETTER...

Coming soon, a journal for the Pickering Township Historical Society!

By: Lys Laurence

Pathmaster will publish short articles on the history of the Pickering

Township area, as well as news about the Historical Society itself. The forum for longer articles and essays will be the proposed journal for the Pickering Township Historical Society. Some of the topics may be similar to those suggested for the newsletter, but more elaborate than those published in *Pathmaster*. In addition, the journal will publish original

documents such as old newspaper articles, business records, and diaries. Your submissions to this proposed journal are welcome now.

Do you have any of these original documents? Is there a longtime

resident you could interview for an oral history? Do you have any interesting photographs of people or places in the Pickering Township area?

Name the Journal Contest! Your suggestion could become the official name of the new journal. Submit your suggested name(s) to Lys Laurence at

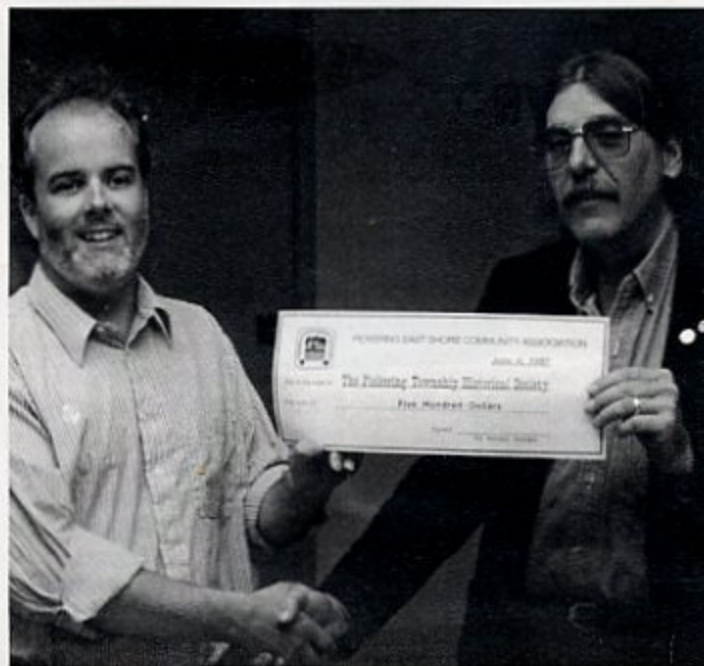
**NAME
THE
JOURNAL
CONTEST!**

905-839-9837 or by E-mail at faithfinn@myna.com. Please include your name, phone number, and complete address.

THANKS!

The PTHS would like to acknowledge the following for their contributions to the newsletter and to the foundation of our fledgling society:

Maria and Jim Skentzos, Old Liverpool House; Pickering Central Library; Pickering East Shore Community Association; Sylvia Spencer; Jane Buckles; The Claremont Lionesses; and Regional Councillors Maurice Brenner & Doug Dickerson.



Roy Robinson (left), President of the Pickering East Shore Community Association (PESCA) presents PTHS President Tom Mohr with a cheque for start-up funds.



**PICKERING
TOWNSHIP
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

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COMING EVENTS:

General Meetings of the Pickering Township Historical Society

Day: Second Tuesday of the month, September through June

Time: 7:30 p.m. **Place:** Pickering Recreation Complex

FALL SCHEDULE:

Tuesday, 9 September 1997

Guest speaker: Allan McGillivray, Curator of the Uxbridge-Scott Museum, will address "Our Common Quaker Heritage". Plans are also to honour Dr. William A. McKay, author of *The Pickering Story*, and Melba McKay, compiler of the Tweedsmuir History of Pickering.

Tuesday, 14 October 1997

Guest speaker: William Parish, former mayor of Ajax, will talk about "A Shared History: Ajax and Pickering".

Tuesday, 11 November 1997

Guest speaker: Dorothy Britton, President of the Claremont Women's Institute, and other members of the Claremont W.I. will speak about the achievements of the local organization in this, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Women's Institutes.

Tuesday, 9 December 1997
Members night.

This is your night to display collections and items relating to the history of Pickering Township. Or perhaps you have some photographs to exhibit or have identified, or slides to show. Please contact **Tom Mohr** in advance to tell him what you're bringing.